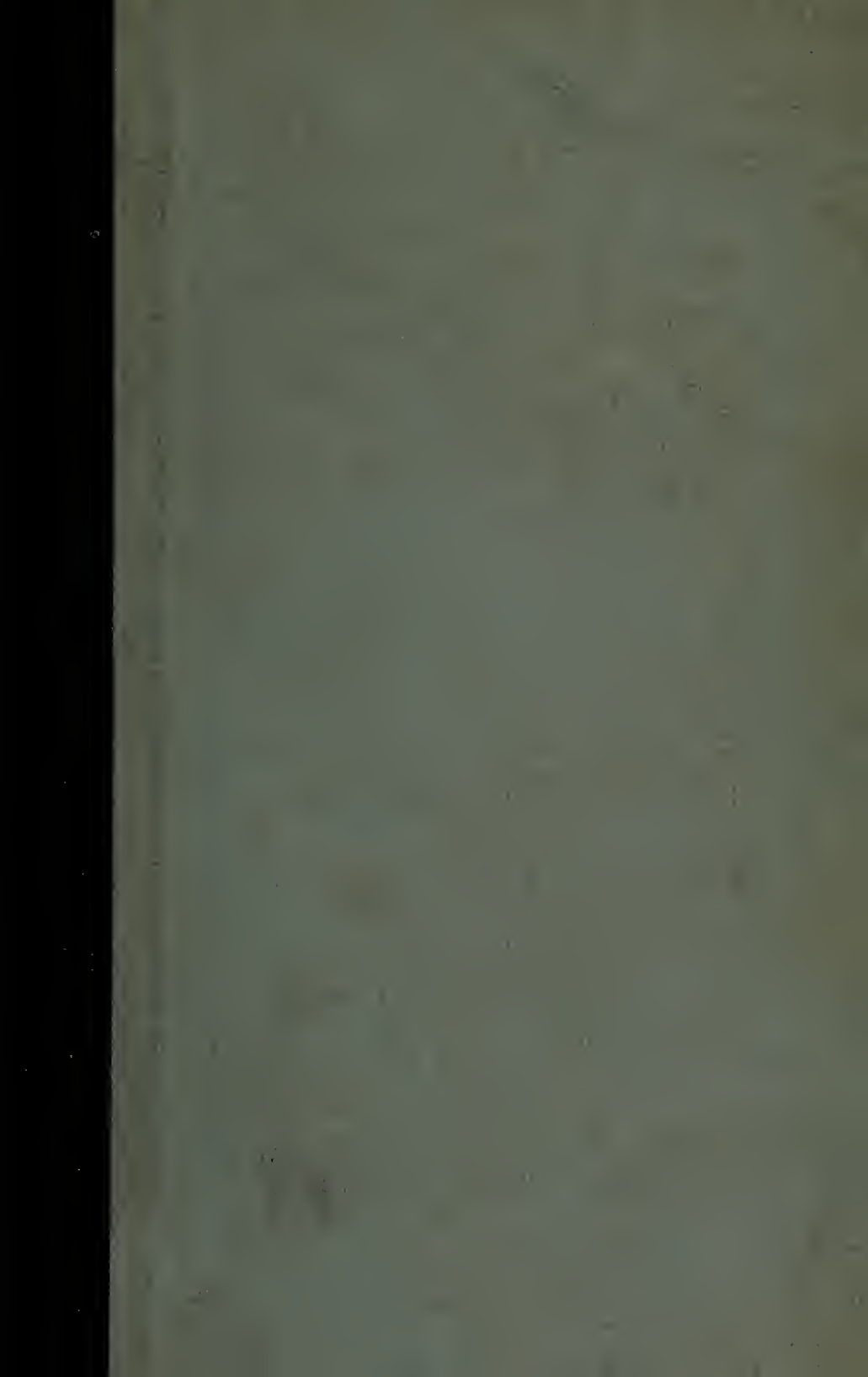
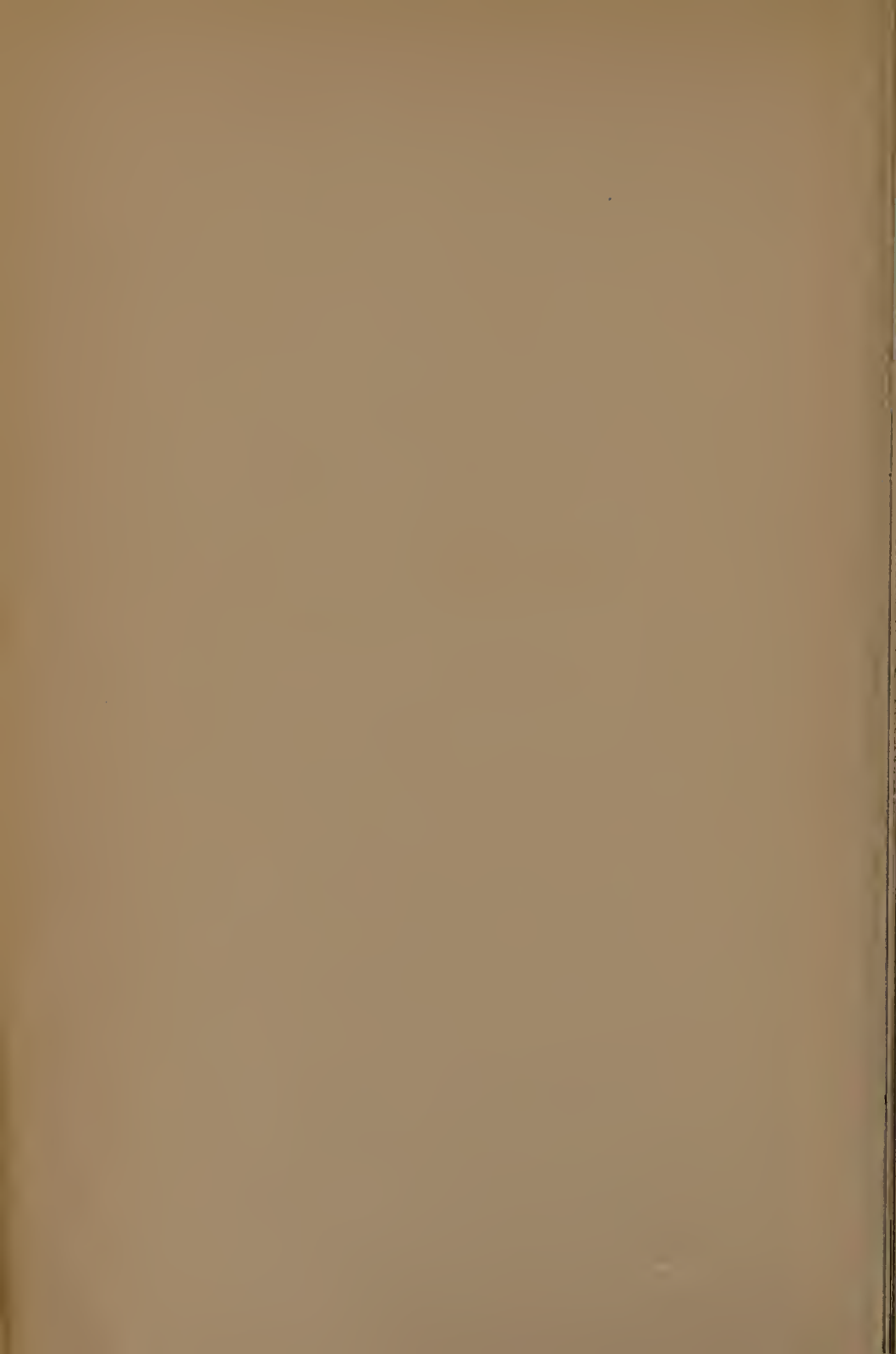








THE BELT

THE BELT

BY
PAUL SIFTON



A New Playwrights' Theatre Production

NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES

THE BELT

was first presented by the NEW PLAYWRIGHTS' THEATRE,
at their playhouse, 40 Commerce Street, New York,
on October the nineteenth, 1927.

Directed by EDWARD MASSEY
Settings designed by JOHN DOS PASSOS

CHARACTERS:

FLORA THOMPSON.....	Jane Barry
NANCE THOMPSON.....	Gail De Hart
JIM THOMPSON.....	Ross Matthews
BUNNER, A SECRETARY.....	Franchot Tone
AARONSON, A SECRETARY.....	Benjamin Osipow
THE OLD MAN.....	George N. Price
SAM, A FIDDLER.....	Willard Williams
BILL VANCE.....	Lawrence Bolton
GEORGE	Herbert Bergman Murray Franklin Herman Bandes Edward Franz Edward Buckman Benjamin Osipow
FRANK	
FRED	
HARRY	
JACK	
STEVE	
.....WORKMEN.....	
A FOREMAN.....	Parker Totten
TRACY.....	Moss Fleisig
CARSON.....	Charles P. Thompson
JACOBSON.....	Irwin Swerdlow
HENDRICKS.....	Lionel Ferrend
A POLICE CAPTAIN.....	Parker Totten

WOMEN, WORKMEN, ETC.

Ellen Vorse, Mona Lewis, Ellen Bartlett, Mary Dorr, Muriel Snow, Helen Johnson, Elizabeth Keenan, June White, Seth Baldwin, Montague Ash, Reginald Lawrence, Paul Du Bow, David Seligman, McGrew Kimball, John T. Vogel, Edwin Clare

Music composed and directed by Heaton Vorse
The Belt mechanism designed by Remo Bufano

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JIM THOMPSON

FLORA THOMPSON, *his wife*

NANCE THOMPSON, *their daughter*

BILL VANCE

THE OLD MAN

AARONSON

BUNNER

SAM

TRACY

CARLSON

HENDRICKS

POLICE CAPTAIN

WORKMEN, TWO SECRETARIES, PHOTOGRAPHERS,
REPORTERS, WORKERS' WOMEN, DANCERS, PO-
LICE, ETC.

Act One

SCENE I. *The living room of Jim Thompson's home.*

SCENE II. *The same as Scene I, in part.*

Act Two

The same as Act One, Scene I.

The next night.

Act Three

The Belt.

Half an hour later.

ACT ONE

SCENE I.

The living-room of JIM THOMPSON'S home. It is the ordinary home of a semi-skilled, "well-paid" machine worker.*

The distant hum of The Belt seems to form a continuous curtain against which the Act is played. Talk is carried on in high, strained tones, rising frequently to sudden peaks of shouts and screeching.

As the curtain rises, JIM THOMPSON is just closing the street door in the hall. In the room are FLORA, his wife, a faded, furtive coquette verging on the menopause, and NANCE, a gamy girl of nineteen. NANCE is rummaging through a basket of stockings on the center table, trying to find a pair of silk stockings without holes in them. She has water-wave combs in her hair, is half-dressed, obviously rushing into her war clothes and make-up. FLORA is sitting in her chair, a magazine in her lap, doing nothing.

FLORA

[*Lazily, to JIM.*] What was it?

* Technical Note: The davenport and light should be a separate unit, so that the rest of the set may be struck quickly for transition to Scene II.

JIM

[Coming into the room, picking up the evening paper and going slowly to his chair.] Damn tin-can tourists . . . whole family . . . had a breakdown. Two kids were playin' the radio and dancing——

NANCE

[Looking up from the stockings.] Dancing? What'd they say?

JIM

Nothing. They beat it! I told them to. . . . Some folks seem to think the whole world belongs to them just as soon as they can pay twenty dollars down on a mess of tin and four wheels. . . . *[As he eases himself into his chair and opens the paper.]* But I told them where to get off at, all right!

NANCE

[Rummaging through the stockings with pettish haste.] Ma, why don't you ever darn my stockings?

FLORA

Why don't you darn them yourself?

NANCE

Because I'm tired. I'm so tired I could drop by the time I get home.

FLORA

. . . But not too tired to stay up until midnight.
. . .

NANCE

That's different. . . . Darning gets on my nerves.
. . . What do you do all day, anyhow, while I'm working my head off?

FLORA

[*With drawling dislike.*] Oh, nothing . . . clean the house, wash dishes, cook meals for you, wash and iron your clothes . . . that's all.

NANCE

Well, don't I pay cash for everything I get—and some things I don't—like darning! [*Crossing to FLORA with a pair of stockings.*] Why don't you darn them now? You aren't doing anything.

FLORA

[*In the same pose of indifference.*] . . . Darn them yourself. . . . You're old enough to do things for yourself now. [*A slight edge of salacity in her tone.*] You're almost a grown woman——

NANCE

[*Angrily, bending over her mother.*] Say! What's all this talk about being "grown up"? That's the fourth time I've heard that crack since I got home. What's the idea?

FLORA

[*Lazily thumbing the magazine.*] Oh, nothing.
. . . Bill's coming again tonight, ain't he?

JIM

[*Dully, from behind the paper.*] He was here last night. [*Lowering the paper and speaking to NANCE.*] How late did he stay?

NANCE

[*Threading a needle and starting to darn.*] . . .
About . . . eleven.

FLORA

[*After a pause.*] You didn't come in until after twelve. . . . I heard you.

NANCE

Well, what's the difference?

[*JIM drops the paper to the floor at the side of his chair and sits still, staring dully. For the first time one sees that weariness shows in every line of his body, in the droop of his head, neck and shoulders and the lifeless hang of his unnaturally long arms and the moveless hands over the arms of his chair. His eyes have a vacant gaze, almost as if he were in a trance.*]

JIM

[*After a moment, speaking half to himself.*] They got him putting on fenders. He can't stand it. He's got to have some sleep. . . .

NANCE

[*Laughing as she darns.*] You should kick! He's standing it pretty well. He's young.

JIM

. . . Ain't natural. . . . 'Been doing it six months. . . . There's something funny about him. . . . [*He stirs slightly and asks in a gray voice.*] What time is it?

FLORA

[*Turning her head from long habit to look at the clock.*] Fifteen minutes to nine.

JIM

. . . Well, 'most time to turn in. [*He yawns.*]

FLORA

[*Looking curiously, a trifle enviously, at NANCE.*] Never mind the hole. He doesn't notice your stockings, does he?

NANCE

[*Angrily.*] Say! Can this stuff about him and me, will you? I guess I can look out for myself! [*Speaking more directly to FLORA.*] You don't

need to work one of your Certified Confessions off on us. That's all I hear at the office all day . . . dirty cracks by a lot of girls who couldn't grab off a man like Bill if they had a chance. [*She finishes the stocking and starts on the second.*] You can't drive your manure-spreader through my yard!

JIM

[*Sleepily.*] Stop that talk, Nance! You oughta have your mouth soaped.

FLORA

[*To JIM.*] Why don't you?

JIM

[*Making a slight hopeless motion with one hand.*] Wouldn't do any good.

FLORA

I think it's perfectly disgusting. [*JIM feels for the paper, picks it up and tries to read.*]

NANCE

[*Making a face at FLORA and JIM.*] Yah! Well, sometimes you don't talk fit to eat, yourself! I say it and get rid of it; you think it—that's the difference. [*She darns hurriedly.*] If you had more work to do, you'd be better off. That's the truth!

FLORA

You'd better get dressed.

NANCE

[*Continuing.*] Now look at me. I work like a dog all day, take my loving four nights a week from the best boy friend I can scare up and go to sleep the minute I hit the hay. What's the answer? I ain't afraid to look myself in the face. My mind ain't a cross-word puzzle full of dirty ideas about people. I'm healthy. . . . I'm so healthy I'm miserable, sometimes.

JIM

Nance, shut up and get dressed before Bill gets here. I want to get to bed early.

[NANCE *finishes darning the second stocking, picks up the other and starts to her room.*]

FLORA

[*Opening her magazine.*] Don't let that "loving" go too far, Nancy.

[NANCE *turns, crosses to FLORA, snatches the magazine, flips it open to a story, points to the title and slaps the magazine back into her mother's lap.*]

NANCE

[*Quoting.*] "I Didn't Know When to Stop, Certified Confession Number 23606, by An Old Maid in a Hall Bedroom." [*As she flounces out.*] All I got to say is: Some folks don't know when to begin!

JIM

[*Yawning.*] What time is it, Flo?

FLORA

[*Turning again to look at the clock.*] Ten minutes to nine.

JIM

Chees's, they certainly took it out of us! Shoving it up to twenty-four hundred this week to beat Boston. . . . Did four hundred and sixty to-day. . . . It's getting late. . . . S'pose he's late on purpose?

NANCE

[*Loudly, from her room.*] No, he isn't "late on purpose." He's gone downtown for a new suit, if you want to know. [*She laughs.*] I'm his heavy date!

[*A pause. FLORA rises and crosses to JIM; sits on the arm of his chair and pushes back his graying hair.*]

FLORA

What's the matter, Jim? Tired? [*She puts her cheek against his forehead.*]

JIM

[*Dully.*] Sure. . . . Always used up. . . . Sleepy. . . . Since I fell down on the quota last month. . . . Four hundred and sixty doors are hell. . . .

They don't get on themselves. . . . [FLORA *kisses him, but gets no response.*] . . . Four hundred and sixty is a lot. . . . Fifty-eight an hour. . . .

FLORA

Let's get the car out. I'll drive. . . . It's warm outside.

JIM

No, can't. Gotta get some sleep. They're shoving it up to four hundred and seventy tomorrow. Five days a week is a joke. Six days' work in five! [A pause. He goes on in a different tone, still dry, but with a whisper of hope in it.] A man was talkin' to me about a forty-acre farm up near Reed City. . . . Wants two thousand down, two hundred an acre, five years to pay, good soil, new house, good barn, five miles from town. . . .

FLORA

[Controlling herself.] Come on and have a "heavy date" with me tonight. We'll take the car. . . . Or maybe the movies? . . . Ramon Novarro! . . .

JIM

. . . He said he'd pay expenses if I'd go up and look at it. . . .

FLORA

[Her anger getting out of control.] But think of the money we've made—don't be silly!

JIM

[*Dreamily.*] You don't think you'd like it?

FLORA

[*Jumping to her feet in anger.*] No! We got out alive last time! But don't forget we had to borrow the cash to get here from Ma!

JIM

. . . Well, what have we got now?

FLORA

Don't be a fool! [*She looks closely at JIM.*] Are you serious about this, Jim?

JIM

Sure I am. I'm not going to be a god-damn machine all my life.

FLORA

Well, I'll tell you what we've got out of this. We've paid off that five hundred, haven't we?

JIM

Mmhm.

FLORA

We've got five hundred in the bank——

JIM

Mmhm.

FLORA

Then we've got insurance, a car, this house partly paid for and, thank Heaven, some decent clothes!

JIM

[*Patiently.*] That's what I meant. I figured maybe we had enough to go on a farm without breakin' our backs to make the payments.

FLORA

Yes, just when we get something saved up, you want to throw it away. . . .

JIM

[*Rising wearily.*] Aw, Flo, what I mean is—here I am, getting old, almost forty-seven, an' just a job stickin' on doors . . . a foreman one month and nothing the next if I fall down. . . . Dead tired every night by quittin' time. What the hell is two days off when you're too tired to do anything! What do I get out of it, nothing! You don't get nothing, either. All I can do is come home, go to bed. . . . We ain't gettin' anywhere.

FLORA

You might go to a show or a party, sometimes, like we used to, before. . . . Maybe you'll be foreman next month. . . .

JIM

Not a chance. I know when I'm stuck. . . . What if I did keep goin' out nights? What does that get us? Bad booze, same old crowd. Look at Ralph. That's what got him. Workin' days and hitting it up nights. He'd get his health back on a farm, maybe.

NANCE

[Coming out, dressed, looks at clock anxiously and crosses to street window to peep out at edge of shade.] You said several mouthfuls, Dad. That's what Bill thinks, too.

FLORA

[To Jim.] You've really got this idea in your head?

JIM

Sure have, Flo. We've got enough here. Better get out before we're kicked out. S'pose I flop on the job one of these days—ten men passed out to-day—s'pose one of The Old Man's snoopers should find that beer down in the cellar. . . .

FLORA

[Waving his feeble arguments aside.] They won't. *[She gathers herself for the counter-attack.]* You really think you're going to get me back on a dinky farm filled with quack grass and hard work! Get up at four and work my fingers

to the bone to pay a mortgage that can't be paid, just like before. No friends, no place to go, movies once a week if we're lucky, never if we ain't. [*She tries to put her arms around his neck in the best movie tradition as she speaks in a false throaty tone.*] You aren't asking me to do **that**, are you, Jim?

NANCE

[*Going to the phonograph-radio and tuning in an orchestra.*] Help! Help! Why not, Ma? I might grab off a nice healthy farmer with a car and a house and lots of jack. . . . You wouldn't be so fat and grouchy, either. [*Maliciously.*] Maybe Cousin Frank's got something to do with it.

[*FLORA's eyelids flicker and she winces slightly.*]

JIM

[*Wearied by the shrill voices.*] All right! I just asked you what you thought about it. If you don't want to do it, all right, just say so! [*A pause. NANCE turns dials, brings in another station.*] Seen Frank lately? . . . How's he doing now? Cars selling?

NANCE

[*Swaying to the music and poking her hair into place.*] Ma, have you got an aspirin? Feel kind of fuzzy in the head.

FLORA

[*To JIM.*] He dropped in to-day. Says he's getting along fine. . . . Always says it's too bad you didn't go in with him. . . . [*To NANCE.*] Look in the top drawer. [*NANCE goes out door, back, left, and FLORA picks up her wooing again.*] Jim, do you still love me? [*Desperation peers round the edge of the question as she repeats.*] Do you, Jim?

JIM

[*Looking at her stupidly.*] Sure. [*A pause.*] Why all the worry?

FLORA

Honey! . . . Don't you feel well?

JIM

[*Still staring at her.*] Frank come out this way often?

FLORA

No. . . . What makes you think that?

JIM

Ever' time I happen to ask if he's been here—he has.

FLORA

Isn't that funny! That's a coincidence, isn't it?

JIM

[*Grimly.*] That's what the travelling salesman said.

FLORA

[*Archly.*] Jim Thompson!

JIM

[*Smiling sneepishly.*] 'Course I didn't mean that, exactly. I just happened to think of the story. [*He laughs quietly to himself.*] "Coincidence, hell!" says he. "It was business!" [*He laughs again.*]

FLORA

[*Bridling.*] You ought to be ashamed of yourself! [*NANCE enters and crosses to her room.*] Tell me the story, Jim!

JIM

[*Yawning.*] Too dirty. Just a smutty story. You wouldn't get the point of it. [*He drowzes.*]

FLORA

[*Going close to JIM and rubbing herself against him, catlike.*] What's the matter, Jim? You never pay any attention to me any more.

JIM

[*Turning away in weary exasperation.*] Sure, I feel all right. . . . Just tired, like I said when we was talkin' about the farm. . . . What time is it? [*He looks at clock.*] Nine o'clock! [*He sits in his chair again, wearily.*] Four hundred and seventy tomorrow!

[*A pause. FLORA stares angrily at JIM, possibly comparing the inert figure with Cousin Frank. DOOR BELL RINGS IN HALL. NANCE enters from her room, rushes to the street door in hall, opens it, expecting BILL. Instead, she falls back in confusion when BUNNER, a slick, "peppy" secretary to THE OLD MAN, steps in. JIM and FLORA rise apprehensively at sight of him. The door remains ajar.*]

BUNNER

[*To NANCE.*] Hello! [*NANCE, attracted by BUNNER's breezy self-assurance, half-tries to freeze him.*]

NANCE

[*Almost coldly.*] What do you want?

BUNNER

[*Brushing by her with a "see-you-later-Girlie" air and addressing JIM and FLORA.*] Good evening! [*To JIM*] Your name Thompson?

JIM

Yes, sir. J. W. Thompson.

BUNNER

[*Taking out card.*] Fine! I thought so. I'm Harold Bunner—assistant secretary to the Presi-

dent, in charge of personnel relations and welfare. [*Pause.*] He's coming, Mr. Thompson—The President of the Company is coming! He's going to pay you a personal visit—in honor of your long and faithful service. Mr. Thompson, I hope that you will appreciate the great honor that he is about to pay you. It is a recognition of your conscientious helpfulness—your part in the unparalleled expansion which has put the world on wheels—sent our cars to the uttermost parts of the earth, to the steppes of Russia, to the sands of Africa and the islands of the South Seas! It is a reward for your efficiency in the plant and your unblemished character as a head of a family and a citizen of our Republic! Mr. Thompson, I know you will let him know that you are appreciative of all this! [*BUNNER looks around the room to see if everything is in order to receive THE OLD MAN. He turns again to JIM, who is scared. BUNNER smiles a forced grimace of attempted reassurance.*] Everything's all right? Like your work? Home life happy? Savings up to normal? Working conditions all right?

JIM

[*Bewildered.*] Huh?

FLORA

[*Stepping into the breach.*] We are very happy. [*Memories of blurbs she has read come to her aid.*] We feel that we owe everything to Him and to His

wonderful plant, His untiring thoughtfulness and unselfishness, His consideration for all His workers.

BUNNER

[*Rubbing his hands and looking approvingly at NANCE.*] That's the stuff! He'll be right here. Just a moment now. . . . [*To JIM, indicating NANCE.*] Your daughter, Mr. Thompson?

FLORA

[*Beating JIM to a reply.*] Yes, this is Nancy, Mr.——?

BUNNER

Bunner, Harold Bunner, assistant secretary to the President, in charge of personnel relations and welfare.

NANCE

[*Surprising BUNNER by putting out her hand and turning a frank smile full on.*] How do you do, Mr. Bunner. I've seen you before, but you wouldn't remember me, I'm sure.

BUNNER

[*Leaning toward her.*] It must have been in a crowd—maybe at an employees' conference. . . . Otherwise—— [*The sound of cars in the street interrupts him. He breaks away and rushes to the*

door, peers out and turns.] Here they are!
[AARONSON, the Secretary to THE OLD MAN and a larger edition of BUNNER, rushes in.]

AARONSON

[*To BUNNER, in a large whisper.*] Everything all right? Is this the right house? Is he home?—what's-his-name?

BUNNER

Yes, Thompson. [*Turning to JIM and FLORA.*] Mr. Thompson, this is Mr. Aaronson, secretary to the President. . . . And this is Mrs. Thompson . . . and their daughter, Nancy.

AARONSON

[*Rapidly adjusting tables, spilling stockings out on table, cramming darning into FLORA's hands, etc., barely acknowledges the introductions with a curt nod.*] How' do, Thompson. Ten-year man, aren't you?

JIM

[*Trying to gather his wits.*] Huh?

AARONSON

[*Dropping everything and jumping to JIM.*] Been working for Him ten years to-day, haven't you?

JIM

Why, just about, I guess. . . . [*He turns appealingly to FLORA.*] How about it, Flora? 'Member when we came here?

BUNNER

[*Excitedly, at door.*] He's coming!

AARONSON

[*Fiercely, to JIM and FLORA.*] Hurry up! Ten years to-day, wasn't it? . . . That's what your filing card says. Ten years to-day.

FLORA

Why, yes, I remember, the first of July, we came here. That's right. To-day's the first, isn't it?

AARONSON

[*Relieved, turns to greet: two MOVIE CAMERAMEN with Cooper-Hewitt lamps and cords from street and two PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS. They rush in from the street and begin setting up tripods, loading flash-guns, etc., as AARONSON talks.*] Make yourselves at home, boys. This is Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, two of the oldest members of our great and growing family. [*Sound outside of more cars stopping.*]

There's His car! Are you ready? . . . Start cranking when He comes in the door. Never mind what He says. I'll fix that up afterwards. [*AARONSON goes to the street door, waits for MOVIE MEN to give him the signal. He holds up his hand to those outside as a signal to wait.*]

FIRST MOVIE CAMERAMAN

[*Fumbling with the lens and testing the focus.*] Rotten light—— [*To Assistant.*] Put the light on the door—more—hold it—— [*To AARONSON.*] All right, let 'er flicker.

[*AARONSON'S arm beckons to those outside to come in. ALL, except MOVIE MEN and PHOTOGRAPHERS, stand stiffly, unnaturally, as THE OLD MAN, white-haired, shy, yet with the inquisitive, cunning, merciless, smiling face of a fox, comes in the street door. A swarm of reporters crowd in behind him and one, very young, starts making notes.*]

FIRST MOVIE CAMERAMAN

[*Shouting and starting to crank.*] Hold it there, sir. . . . Take off your hat. . . . Now bow to these people. . . . [*THE OLD MAN obeys, smiling timidly.*] All right, now, come on in, shake hands with them. [*HE obeys.*] Hold that until we shift!

[*Cameras are shifted, flash-guns raised.*]

THE OLD MAN

[*Awkwardly, holding JIM's hand while FLORA beams.*] How do you do, Jim—what's your last name, I don't remember——

JIM

Thompson.

THE OLD MAN

Oh, yes. I remember your face. Ten years . . . that's a long time, isn't it, Jim?

JIM

Yes, sir.

THE OLD MAN

[*After looking to see if the photographers are ready.*] 'Been getting along all right?

JIM

Oh, yes. . . . Just fine.

THE OLD MAN

[*Turning to FLORA.*] . . . And this is your wife, Mrs.—what was the name?

FLORA

[*Gushing.*] Thompson, sir, Mrs. Thompson. We've been with you ten years, sir, and we are just as happy now as when we first came here.

[*The reporters crowd in for "copy."*]

FIRST REPORTER

Little louder, please, Mrs. Thompson.

FLORA

[In a loud, self-conscious, speechmaking voice.] We have been busy, happy, and, now, it's ten years. It doesn't seem that long. *[Speaking more directly to THE OLD MAN.]* We just owe everything to you, to your untiring thoughtfulness and unselfishness, our modest savings, our little car——

THIRD REPORTER

What kind of car?

JIM

[Quickly, proudly.] Chevrolet!

AARONSON

[Jumping in front of the REPORTERS and pushing them back.] Never mind that, boys, out of the way. The photographers are ready. *[AARONSON turns THE OLD MAN and JIM around, making their bodies front each other, faces toward the cameras.]* Now, Mrs. Thompson, if you don't mind—— *[AARONSON guides FLORA around to the OLD MAN's left hand and puts THE OLD MAN's left arm around her shoulder.]*

FLORA

[Simpering.] Oh, not at all, I'm sure! *[FLORA beams at THE OLD MAN, who controls his feelings with an effort.]*

AARONSON

[Stepping back and surveying his work critically.] Be sure to smile, everybody smile! This is a historic occasion. . . . Mr.——

BUNNER

Thompson.

AARONSON

Mr. Thompson has just completed ten years service without the loss of a single day. . . . He and his wife are being congratulated by his Chief! *[All smile sillily, except FLORA, who blooms in anticipation of publicity and the proximity of THE OLD MAN. JIM is puzzled.]* Are you ready? *[AARONSON raises his hand for the photographers, who get set to shoot.]*

BUNNER

[Stuttering with fright and sense of duty.] Jjjust a mmmoment, please!

AARONSON

[Whipping round.] What the hell's the matter now?

BUNNER

[Holding out a pin.] I forgot the pin! *[He crosses quickly and pins it on JIM's shirt.]*

JIM

What's that for?

BUNNER

[*In a loud whisper.*] Ten years. . . . Ten years of faithful service!

AARONSON

[*Raising his arm again as ALL resume stiff positions.*] Now are you ready?

THE OLD MAN

Aw, go ahead, Abie! Get it over with. Jim's tired. He's gotta go to work in the morning. We're keeping him up.

[*JIM smiles gratefully at THE OLD MAN, for the first time.*]

AARONSON

[*Lowering his arm to catch JIM's smile.*] Shoot! [*Tremendous explosion, smoking, clicking cameras, coughing.* AARONSON jumps to street door, opens it and turns to the room.] Now for the Old Time Dances, sir! [*Parenthetically, to JIM and FLORA.*] We've brought along a special fiddler and some young people for the good Old-fashioned Dances. . . . Just a little celebration in your honor. [*He fixes them with a hypnotic stare.*] You know!

FLORA

[*Taking her cue.*] Oh, lovely! Yes, I saw their pictures in the magazine Jim brings home from the.

plant every month. [*To NANCE, brightly.*] Nance, you must learn the steps!

AARONSON

[*Turning to the street and waving his arms like a semaphore.*] They're all ready. We brought them out in a bus, just to celebrate Mr.——

BUNNER

[*Looking at NANCE appreciatively.*] Thompson.

AARONSON

—Mr. Thompson's birthday. [*Turning to JIM.*] You come from Arkansas, don't you?

JIM

How's that? . . . Arkansas? Why——
[*The reporters listen.*]

AARONSON

[*Impatiently.*] That's what I understood, Arkansas!

JIM

Well, if you mean where I was born—yes, but you see, my family had to move to Illinois when I was two years old—better land, and, besides, my mother wasn't never very strong after I was born. She hurt her back——

[*The rest of JIM's slow speech is drowned in the inrush of DANCERS through the door from*

the street. They come in ready to dance, girls in old-fashioned costumes, men in fake moustaches and the hard hats of the Nineties, etc. Last of all comes SAM, the demon old-time fiddler of Massachusetts, white-haired and child-like. AARONSON hurries SAM, helps him get out his fiddle, tuning it, drawing up a chair, etc., while THE OLD MAN is trying to talk to JIM and FLORA and the DANCERS, some of whom are unmistakably professionals.]

THE OLD MAN

[*To FLORA.*] Like it here, Mrs. Thompson?

FLORA

[*Bursting with pride and excitement.*] Oh, if you only knew! If I only had words to tell you how happy we have been! These last ten years—such comfort, the knowledge that we were all part of one great happy family! [JIM and THE OLD MAN *fidget, look at each other sympathetically.*] No worry, steady work, nice neighbors, and this house, small, but so conveniently arranged! [*As SAM scrapes his fiddle into tune and the REPORTERS incline their ears to FLORA.*] You know, after all, the thing I like best is that we're all equal here. That's what I like. Nobody's any better than anybody else, that's what I always say. We've got a little money in the bank, furniture, a little car,

clothes, and all our neighbors are real Americans, working, living and playing side by side!

[*The note-taking* REPORTER *puts that down.*]

THE OLD MAN

[*To* JIM.] Only one child? [*Nodding to* NANCE, *who is flirting with* BUNNER.]

JIM

[*Clearing his throat.*] No, sir. Two. Our boy Ralph was putting on tires in the night shift, but he kind of broke down early this spring, somehow.

THE OLD MAN

[*Watching* SAM.] That so?

JIM

Yes, sir, he's in the hospital. Nothin' particular wrong with him, the doctors say. Just don't seem to want to get his strength back. He——

AARONSON

[*Interrupting brusquely.*] Now, let's all get back from the middle of the room and we'll let the young people dance. . . . Are you ready, Sam?

SAM

[*Scraping tentatively.*] Yes sirree!

AARONSON

[Signalling to THE OLD MAN to dance with FLORA and tipping the MOVIE MEN to film HIM.]
All right, let 'er go, Sam. You call the numbers.

THE OLD MAN

[Taking FLORA's hand and speaking to her and to JIM.] Sam's a card! He comes from the country. Jes' listen to him. He's in a class by himself, he is!

SAM

[Patting his foot and beginning to play a wild jagged tune as the DANCERS start.] This is my waltz, "The Ripplin' Waves." *[In a high, cracked voice.]* Gentlemen, gather your partners in your arms an' drift away to paradise. . . . Let your love an' taste in beauty be your guide. . . . Jus' one little dance, but, oh, what a heap one little dance can mean! *[He continues his chant as the dancers jam the floor. BUNNER and NANCE dance blissfully. All whirl and reverse as the camera grinds. SAM breaks off with a twang of strings.]* That's all of that, folkses. . . . How about a little Chicken Reel?

THE OLD MAN

Jim, come on an' dance! You used to do this, didn't you? I learned how down East last winter.

JIM

[Smiling.] Thirty years ago. My muscles has kind of stiffened up on me lately . . .

THE OLD MAN

Aw, come on. Try it once with me.

AARONSON

[*With a barb in his voice.*] Thompson, you aren't going to let anybody dance you down without trying, are you?

JIM

[*Going to the center of the floor with THE OLD MAN, and looking very foolish and unhappy.*] I'm kinda stiff. 'Put on four hundred and sixty doors to-day. [*He lines up next THE OLD MAN, at whom he smiles gropingly.*] Gettin' old, I guess. Haveta have more sleep than I usedta.

THE OLD MAN

[*To JIM and the others.*] This is the stuff that makes you feel young again. Good old-fashioned fun! It's healthy. [*Half-timidly, he slaps JIM on the back and yells to SAM.*] Let 'er go, Sam!

SAM

[*Scraping out the Massachusetts variation of "Turkey in the Straw" as THE OLD MAN and JIM do their best at a hoedown of sorts.*]

Old folks, young folks, ever'body come!

Shake your footses, shake your cares,

Show your girl you're stepping some!

Old folks, young folks, ever'body dum tiddlety-um-tum, dum, dum!

[and so on, in accelerated tempo. THE OLD MAN dances spryly. JIM gives up and drops into a chair hastily vacated by a GIRL DANCER. The Movie Camera runs on as THE OLD MAN dances, amateurishly, with childish pride in his attempts to cut pigeon wings and crack his heels. SAM winds up and ALL applaud frantically.]

FLORA

[Laughing shrilly.] Easy to see you've got plenty of life yet! *[She smiles at THE OLD MAN with a trace of coquettishness.]*

[THE CAMERAMEN pack up hastily and prepare to leave.]

THE OLD MAN

[Mopping his forehead.] That's what this country needs—good old-fashioned fun and exercise!

FIRST REPORTER

Yes, sir.

JIM

[As the REPORTERS follow the PHOTOGRAPHERS and DANCERS out to the street.] —I was telling you about my boy. . . . You see, he made a record three months running for putting on tires—and it kind of did him up, I guess. *[AARONSON waits impatiently at THE OLD MAN's elbow.]* It isn't his fault.

[NANCE and BUNNER talk in low tones in the hall, near the street door.]

THE OLD MAN

[Patting JIM on the shoulder.] I know. . . . Give him time. . . . He'll be all right. . . . You can see that he gets an easier job for a while when he comes back to work. You're foreman, aren't you?

[NANCE laughs gaily at a BUNNER sally and listens for more.]

JIM

[Wretchedly.] I was. . . . 'Been foreman seven times, last time for two years. . . . But last winter Boston beat us two months. . . . I'm puttin' on doors. . . .

[In a whisper NANCE dictates her telephone number to BUNNER who turns his back on AARONSON to write it in a date-book. THE OLD MAN starts to say something.]

AARONSON

[Interrupting briskly.] That taught you something, didn't it? [He slaps JIM on the back in "My good man!" style.] Next time we'll beat Boston, hey?

JIM

[*To THE OLD MAN.*] What was you going to say?

THE OLD MAN

[*Obeying AARONSON's hand on his elbow.*] Take care of yourself, Jim, and better luck. I've got to be going now. [THE OLD MAN *puts out his hand and he and JIM shake.*] I hope I shake hands with you on your twentieth anniversary. [*He turns to FLORA.*] Good-bye, Mrs.—

FLORA

[*Smiling eagerly.*] Thompson.

THE OLD MAN

[*Smiling winningly at her.*] . . . Take care of Jim. He's been a good man. [THE OLD MAN and AARONSON *go toward the door to the street, BUNNER straightens and steps back, NANCE follows him. THE OLD MAN and AARONSON are about to exit when THE OLD MAN sees NANCE and turns to shake hands with her and say good-bye.*] Good-bye, Miss—

[BILL *enters, coming in the door like a shot, and half-turned to look at the cars and people in the street. Those in the room freeze in their postures at his entrance. THE OLD MAN continues to hold NANCE's hand. BILL turns, sees NANCE first.*]

BILL

Say—— Sorry I'm late. . . . I had a—a blow-out . . . [*He sees the others, notices THE OLD MAN holding NANCE's hand. He tries to speak, but no words come. There is an awkward moment. BILL, blocking the door, can't make out the tableau. THE OLD MAN smiles vaguely. AARONSON is watchful. THE THIRD REPORTER lounges in the doorway, behind BILL.*]

BUNNER

[*Taking a step forward.*] Who's this guy? [*NANCE puts out her hand to stop BUNNER. That doesn't help BILL. JIM comes forward to ease things.*]

JIM

[*Thumb lifting a fold of his shirt to show his button with attempted pride, but more to explain to BILL what has happened.*] Bill, see what I got!

BILL

[*Leaning forward to look at it.*] What for?

FLORA

[*Gushingly, her eye and her mind on THE OLD MAN.*] For ten years loyal and faithful service to the company!

BILL

[*Looking sideways toward THE OLD MAN.*]—That all they gave you?

THIRD REPORTER

[*Quickly, gently.*] What would you expect?

[*BILL whips about. AARONSON hustles in between BILL and the others.*]

AARONSON

[*Beckoning to THE OLD MAN, BUNNER and the THIRD REPORTER.*] We gotta be going. The cars are waiting. [*He shakes hands with JIM and FLORA.*]

[*BUNNER says something amusing to NANCE, who smiles slightly, her eyes on BILL. BUNNER walks out. BILL watches BUNNER go.*]

THIRD REPORTER

[*Planting himself in front of BILL.*] What were you going to say?

BILL

[*Talking fast, a trifle self-consciously.*] Why, for ten years on The Belt—I'd expect—— [*He breaks off with a half-laugh.*] A pin! . . . After they've taken the life out of you——

AARONSON

[*Jumping in front of the REPORTER and trembling with fright and anger as he speaks to BILL.*] What's your name? Who's your foreman?

BILL

[*Gathering himself.*] What the hell is that to you?

THE OLD MAN

[*Suddenly bustling, gathering the THIRD REPORTER and AARONSON.*] That's all right, Abie, never mind. [*He puts out his hand and addresses everybody, including the REPORTER.*] I like to see a little spunk. [THE OLD MAN and BILL touch hands and THE OLD MAN goes to the door, waves to JIM and FLORA.] Good-bye, Jim. Take care of yourself.

[THE OLD MAN goes out to the street. The THIRD REPORTER hangs behind, his eyes on BILL.]

AARONSON

[*Catching the THIRD REPORTER's arm and pulling him out.*] Come on, Mac, no rough stuff. . . . You promised. . . . He's nobody.

THIRD REPORTER

[*Turning in the doorway, to BILL.*] So long. See you again, maybe.

BILL

[*As THIRD REPORTER and AARONSON disappear.*] Any time!

JIM collapses in his chair, staring dully ahead. NANCE sulks by the radio. FLORA picks up a chair that was overturned by one of the photographers, makes a gesture toward setting the room to rights, straightening the rugs, etc. After a moment she turns on BILL, who stands smiling and silent, waiting for an explanation.]

FLORA

[Venting on BILL all her accumulated excitement, awe, and the fear that his entrance and sneer at the Pin has hurt JIM's standing.] You! You! You smart-aleck! Just in time to spoil everything. Ten years we've been here and this is the first time that He has ever come to our house. Just when Jim has begun to get somewhere, maybe, . . . on the one night when the Head of the Company honors him, when the reporters and the moving pictures come to interview him, you have to break in and spoil it all—after me trying to manage everything so beautifully—— [She starts to snifle.] You aren't satisfied to ruin your chances of ever amounting to anything—but you've got to come into our house and let everybody know that you're our friend! [More sniffles.] Like as not, Jim won't get back to be foreman again—just because you knocked the Company in our house. . . . Ten years we've worked for this night, for a little thanks from Him—and then you had to spoil it—after all I did to make Him

feel at home! [*She pauses to sniffle into her handkerchief, meanwhile straightening the table-runner, putting the darning back in the basket.*]

BILL

[*Putting his arm around her and kissing her on the cheek.*] Don't you believe it! They wouldn't hold it against you. Why! Jim's about the only ten year man they've got. They got to treat him right. Most of them die off, or quit—if they don't get soft jobs—something happens to 'em. Don't you worry! [*He pats her cheek playfully.*] Jim's safe!

FLORA

[*Warming to BILL's vitality.*] Yeah—he was until you had to spoil it all.

BILL

I didn't spoil anything . . . I didn't get a chance!

FLORA

Lucky, too, or you'd——

BILL

[*Patting her.*] Aw, c'mon now! Don't you like me any more? [*He kisses her cheek.*]

FLORA

[*Trying to hide her enjoyment.*] You! . . . Somebody ought to spank you! . . . You're a nice kid, only you don't know your place.

BILL

[*Laughing.*] Thank God for that! . . . Didja hear what I said to that guy—he was a reporter!——

FLORA

[*Her apprehension reviving.*] —But in front of The Old Man!

BILL

[*Conscious of NANCE, sulking in the shadows.*] Sure, I wanted Him to get an earful! I'd a told him some more if that damn secretary hadn't stopped me! [*NANCE steals a glance of admiration at him.*] Cheesus, this ain't the only damn place I can get a job, I'll tell the world!

JIM

[*Absently, half to FLORA.*] "Take care of yourself." [*To BILL.*] Hear that? "Take care of myself," he says.

FLORA

And you ought to, too. He was right.

JIM

[*Timidly.*] I could get a good rest on a farm, maybe——

NANCE

[*Quickly, to FLORA.*] You heard what He said to you, didn't you?

FLORA

[*Avidly.*] What did He say? . . . He said so many different things and there was so much going on . . . dancing and people and everything. . . . What'd He say?

NANCE

[*With sarcasm.*] He told you to take care of Pa!

JIM

[*Absently, half to FLORA.*] I thought maybe He'd say something about Ralph. . . . [*To BILL.*] That damn kid just don't want to work, that's the truth!

BILL

[*Camouflaging tenderness with mockery.*] Do you?

JIM

No-o. . . . But I've got to! . . . Holy Smoke! [*He jumps up and looks at the clock.*] Quarter after ten! C'mon, Flora, we gotta get to bed. [*To BILL.*] They're putting out four hundred and seventy tomorrow.

BILL

[*Mockingly.*] And four hundred and eighty the day after. Wait till the end of the month!

FLORA

[*Going toward the hall door.*] Wasn't it nice of Him to surprise us! . . . Just like a god-father He

is—after all—— [*No response.*] Lock the front door, Nance. [*To BILL.*] Good-night, all. [*She exits toward the bedroom up the hall.*]

JIM

[*After waiting until FLORA is out of hearing.*] Young fellow, you better watch out for that Aaronson guy. . . . He's got you spotted.

BILL

[*Laughing for NANCE's benefit.*] I should tear my shirt!

JIM

That's all right, but you watch. . . . [*To BILL and NANCE.*] Better not stay up too late. [*To BILL.*] You gotta hard job. Nance's got to get up early, too. [*He goes to NANCE and pats her shyly, tenderly, clumsily.*] Good-night. [*He goes to the hall door, upper left.*]

BILL

[*Crossing to JIM and taking his hand.*] Good-night, Jim. Don't you worry about me. . . . I can take care of myself. There ain't a job in the world that's got me licked.

JIM

All right, kid, have it your own way. . . . I've been doing it ten years. [*As he goes out the door to bed, his shoulders bent wearily:*] . . . And now

The Old Man says, "Take care of yourself, Jim."
[*Exits.*]

[*Left alone, NANCE and BILL grope in the haze of passionate fumbling for each other. They stand awkwardly apart, looking furtively at each other. Outwardly, each is angry with the other; inwardly, both burn with exploring curiosity and a little love.*]

BILL

[*Crossing to NANCE.*] Who's that guy?

NANCE

[*Coolly.*] Who?

BILL

That damn sheik you were so hot about when I came in. Who is he?

NANCE

O-oh! That is Mr. Bunner, assistant to the President, personnel and welfare.

BILL

[*After staring at NANCE a moment.*] You going to fall for him!

NANCE

Why not? He certainly has swell m a n n e r s, I'll say that for him!

BILL

Meaning what?

NANCE

[*Pointing to the clock.*] When you try to kid the clock, you usually miss the train, that's all. . . . Go on, tell me how much you think of me. . . . I need a good laugh.

BILL

[*Slipping into his pose of appealing boyishness.*] Aw, Nance, I'm sorry I was late. I——

NANCE

[*Her voice tight.*] Oh, that's all right, Bill. [*She walks to the table and stands there, staring blindly at nothing.*]

BILL

[*Following her.*] That stall about the blow-out was the bunk. . . . I was at a lecture downtown.

NANCE

. . . Too bad you bothered to come out!

BILL

But, Chees's, Nance, I had to go.

NANCE

[*After a pause, half-turning.*] Why didn't you say something last night about the date with the bull artist?

BILL

[*Coming close to NANCE.*] . . . But, honest, Nance, I forgot about it. He was a great guy. I had to go. That's why I called you up.

NANCE

Why didn't you ask me to go?

BILL

I forgot about it, Nance, honest. Aw——

NANCE

You think I'm a sap. I know. I'm a good frail to have in the dark, but when it comes to lapping up the bunk, you go by yourself. . . . I know——

BILL

[*Standing over her.*] Nance, I'll break your goddam neck if you don't ditch that line!

NANCE

[*Staring at him, her lips quivering.*] Go on, break it! [*They glare at each other.*] Go on, break it! . . . Do something. . . . That what you learned at the lecture? . . . Break it! . . . Why don't you? . . .

BILL

[*Crushing NANCE in his arms, kissing and fondling her.*] Cheesus, Nance, you know I didn't do it on purpose!

NANCE

[*Trying to be enigmatic.*] Maybe!

BILL

[*Clutching her shoulders.*] What's the idea?
. . . What was that damn bell-hop talking to you
about?

NANCE

He's no bell-hop. He's a gentleman! . . . Lemme
go, you're hurting me . . . that's more than **you**
are!

[*BILL drops his hands.*]

BILL

[*Laughing bitterly.*] So you fell for that snake!
Listen, do you know——

NANCE

[*Ritzily.*] I don't care to discuss Mr. Bunner.

BILL

Why not?

NANCE

[*Turning on BILL.*]. Listen, you aren't the only
station broadcasting! If I want to find out any-
thing about Mr. Bunner I can tune in on his wave-
length—by request!

BILL

Did he make a date?

NANCE

Tried to. I told him to call me up.

BILL

Don't be a sap! He just wants to play you for a tumble and then, zippo, you'll have a long walk home!

NANCE

That's what **you** say! Maybe he's a better bet than you think. . . . Maybe he'd fall hard enough for me to let it show once in awhile. . . . Maybe——

BILL

[Thrusting his face close to hers.] Cut it!

[She halts. BILL waits a moment, then gathers her in a fierce kiss and embrace.]

NANCE

[Breaking away at length and laughing.] All right, that's enough! *[She goes to the phonograph-radio and puts on a record.]* Let's dance before they— *[Jerking her head toward the hall door.]* —get to sleep. . . . Huh? *[She starts to crank. He crosses, takes the crank and finishes as she starts the needle on the record. He steps clear, holds out his arms, they clinch and kiss until the record is finished and the needle scratches on the core. They come up twice for air. Stroking his neck.]* Let's dance.

BILL

[Bending again to her lips.] All right!

NANCE

[Pushing his face away.] Bill!

BILL

[Finding her lips again.] What?

NANCE

[Breaking finally as the needle scratches.] You almost broke my neck, sure enough!

BILL

[Turning the record and restarting the machine.] Told you I would!

NANCE

[Going to the center of the room and opening her arms.] C'mon.

BILL

[Starting to dance with her.] Here's a new one!

[They do a slick dance, all the frills and tough, toward the end simplified by their clinging contact.]

NANCE

[As the record ends.] Gosh, I'm getting old and feeble. . . . My legs!—oh!

BILL

Old lady! [*Changing the record and rewinding.*] Here, watch me! [*BILL dances a Black Bottom, or equivalent, at a terrific pace.*] How's that? [*Breathlessly, proudly.*] Not so rotten, huh?

NANCE

You're there, Bill! I don't see how you get the pep.

BILL

Aw, you could do it—if you didn't kid yourself.

NANCE

Naw, it ain't that. [*Leaning against the table.*] I'm tired . . . dead tired . . .

BILL

Let's do a slow one, then. [*He changes the record for a slower one, switches out the overhead lights, leaving only the light over the davenport at the side, and turns to NANCE.*] Like this——

NANCE

[*Melting into his arms.*] A'right.

[*They do a slow waltz, one step, with kisses, languorous whirls and dips and pivots.*]

BILL

Chees's, Nance, I'm crazy about you!

NANCE

Honest, Bill?

BILL

[*Bending back her head and glowering into her eyes.*] Gowan! Don't kid me! I'll break your back!

NANCE

[*Straightening like a whip and laughing.*] Yes, you will!

BILL

[*Kissing her deliberately, ravenously.*] Yes, I will!

[*As the record ends, they break and NANCE stands leaning against the table, weak and breathless. BILL shuts off the phonograph.*]

NANCE

Gee, I'm all in!

BILL

[*Leading her over to the davenport.*] C'mon and sit down and rest your face and hands.

NANCE

[*Collapsing on the davenport, her head and shoulders in BILL's lap.*] Say, Bill, you certainly are a fast worker! I give up! [*BILL bends to kiss her.*] Go easy! Put a stop-watch on 'em or out you go, remember!

[BILL *kisses her lips and eyes softly, caresses her face and neck with his hands.*]

BILL

Don't be afraid, Nance. . . . I like you. . . . See?

NANCE

[*Playing with his chin and nose.*] . . . What'd the bunk-thrower say?

BILL

[*Moodily, bitterly.*] . . . Nothing new.

NANCE

[*After a short pause.*] What?

BILL

Nothing.

NANCE

[*Lying quite still, speaking in a hard voice.*] Bill, you're holding out on me. Tell me about it. . . . I got a brain, just like you. Maybe I got a better one. . . . What's all this stuff you think about? . . . The Belt . . . and people . . . everything? . . . What makes you go downtown to those meetings?

BILL

[*Slowly.*] I'm off telling girls. . . . They laugh and tell me to forget it. . . .

NANCE

[*Pulling down his head.*] . . . I won't, Bill. . . . Honest.

BILL

[*After a moment.*] Listen, Nance, I better not tell you. Just let it go. . . . I'm all right, really. I do my stuff at the plant, drag down my money—that's all. . . . The rest is nobody's business.

NANCE

[*With sarcasm.*] You think a lot of me, don't you?

BILL

[*Raising her in his arms, fiercely.*] Yes! [*He kisses her passionately until she goes limp and her head falls in his lap.*]

NANCE

[*Moaning.*] Oh, Bill! . . . What's it all about? You've gotta tell me, Bill. You've got to!

BILL

[*Tenderly stroking her face.*] You're tired.

NANCE

[*Almost in a murmur.*] Light hurts my eyes . . . they're workin' us hard. . . . Got thirty pages of dictation for tomorrow already. . . . [*Returning a bit.*] Tell me, Bill! [*She puts up a hand to his face.*] What's it all about?

BILL

[*Trying to laugh.*] Aw, Nance, forget it. I'll tell you sometime.

NANCE

Now! Tell me now. . . . You've got to!

BILL

[*Tense.*] Why?

NANCE

Because.

BILL

Why, just curiosity?

NANCE

You know it isn't, Bill.

BILL

Why, then?

NANCE

You know.

BILL

[*Half-raising her.*] . . . Love me, Nance?

NANCE

Do you?

BILL

[*After staring at her awhile.*] Yes. [*He waits for her answer.*]

NANCE

Yes.

[BILL *stares at her a moment in perplexity and fear.*]

BILL

[*Taking a long breath and glancing cautiously toward the hall door.*] . . . It's everything, Nance. . . . I hate it. . . . You get me?

NANCE

Uh huh.

BILL

[*Struggling with his instinct to cover up.*] Oh, I can't say it. You know what I mean.

NANCE

[*Shading her eyes and half-rising from BILL's lap.*] My eyes hurt from that light. Reach up and turn it out.

BILL

[*Obeying.*] I'll have to be going pretty soon. It's getting late. [*The room is dark.*]

NANCE

Now spill it. What do you mean? [*A pause.*]

BILL

Look at your dad.

NANCE

Yeah, I know, but what of it?

BILL

It eats 'em up, makes goddam horses out of them.

NANCE

Not you.

BILL

No, not me! And it won't. . . . The factory won't get me! . . . That's why I didn't want to tell you. I'm different. It isn't going to get me. But the other guys—eight hours, car, jazz, hooch, women—that's what they think, but they don't even get that. Just eight hours, car back and forth, out in the country once a week maybe, sleep, little money saved, maybe, that's all. They don't do anything. Just a lot of goddam mules.

NANCE

Yeah, they don't even kick. Look at dad. Took it lying down when The Old Man didn't do nothing about him losing his foreman job.

BILL

[*Tautly.*] Don't you believe it, Nance. Some of us do. We kick. . . . There's a lot of guys like me around this country. We hold our jobs and run the old-timers ragged on piecework maybe, but they aren't kiddin' us none. They gypped us to-day, made us wait fifty-three minutes on our own time until they got a carload of carburetors and then kidded us out of thirteen minutes at five o'clock. The

foreman pulled that bunk about overtime and then "got orders" to quit just in time for the spotters to beat it to the time clock before overtime started. I figured it out—two hundred and thirty hours work for nothing, eight hundred men thirteen minutes overtime. . . . That's what The Old Man got out of us to-day for nothing. That doesn't count the time he got this morning.

NANCE

Ain't it hell! . . . But what you going to do about it?

BILL

[*After a pause.*] It's got to break. . . . [*Slowly.*] Sometime it's got to break. . . . They can't keep shoving us up and up and up, making Boston beat us this month, telling us we gotta beat Boston next month, making Boston beat us the month after next and Des Moines the week after that and Brooklyn and Kearney and Los Angeles . . . [*Pause.*] Chees's, Nance, d'you realize they're doin' this all over the country! Cars, chewing gum, steel works, shoes, everything—

NANCE

Sure. . . . Don't I work in the front office! [*Imitating an "executive" dictating a variant of a form letter.*] "Dear Mr. McGinnity: Replying to yours of the 19th inst., the showing of the Fort Worth plant, while up to the standard set for the

preceding month, as you point out, must be brought up to the production record made in March by the Kearney, New Jersey, assembling plant. We are counting on you and every man in the Fort Worth plant to show the organization what the Lone Star State can do in efficient production. Under separate cover I am mailing you charts showing the standing of all plants for the last month.” [*Resuming her normal tone.*] Then he says to me: “Gee, I bet it’s hot in Texas already, Miss Thompson.”

BILL

Who’s this?

NANCE

My boss, Mr. Hartman. He just writes letters, all day long, dictates ’em, I mean.

BILL

What kind of a guy is he?

NANCE

’Bout thirty-two. Went to college. . . . He’s got a wife and a baby, two years old. Guess he’s in debt. They got a big car this year. . . . She’s got a rotten voice when she calls up. . . . [*Imitating a 10 karat “lady.”*] “Mr. Hartman, if you please. . . . This is Mrs. Hartman speaking.” . . . I wouldn’t like to be married to that, believe me!

BILL

See, it's got him just like it's got everybody else.
See?

NANCE

Yeah. . . . But, Bill, what about it? Whatcha goin' to do about it? . . . Here you are and whatcha goin' to do? You can't just starve to death.

BILL

. . . Don't I know it! Jesus Christ, don't I know it, Nance! That's why I didn't want to tell you. . . . You and me are crazy about each other, but, listen, Nance—— [*Pause.*] —You listening?

NANCE

[*Faintly.*] Yes.

BILL

Lotsa guys get hooked when they fall for some girl and get married. . . . They aren't going to get me. See? I'm a kicker. . . . You can take that or leave it. . . . What do you say?

NANCE

What do you mean?

BILL

I mean: Here's one bozo who isn't going to be nailed down by a wife and a lot of children and a house and a car and everything. . . . Something's going to break pretty soon and I want to be ready. . . . Maybe tomorrow. . . . I gotta be free! Get me! That's what the "bull artist" said tonight. I

gotta be free to raise hell, to tell The Old Man and his whole goddam gang to go to hell. . . . I gotta be free to go along with the other men who feel like I do, to do any goddam thing in the world to break this—this—— [BILL's *voice falls and he continues softly.*] You savvy, Nance? I love you, but that's the way I am. What do you say?

NANCE

'Sall right with me, Bill.

BILL

You mean it!

NANCE

Sure.

BILL

[*With hushed fierceness.*] God! [*A pause.*]

NANCE

[*Sleepily.*] . . . Gee, I'm tired . . . sleepy. . . . I guess I love you, Bill, don't you?

BILL

Mmm Hmm. [*A pause.*]

NANCE

. . . You oughta be goin'. . . . Gee, I certainly am sleepy! . . . [*A pause.*]

BILL

So'm I. [*Silence, slow curtain, house lights up slowly.*]

SCENE II.

Three hours later.

Davenport and section of wall behind it with electric light above stands from Scene I.

The remainder of the stage is set deep for The Belt running from upper right to center left. The Belt is a procession of skeletons of automobiles in process of assembling.

A straight backdrop of splotched orange or impressionist portrait of the whole system of Straight Line Production—a composite of machinery, middle class luxury, a family group in a car on the “open road,” à la Satevepost, show and movie posters, corner of a bankbook, gin bottles, church, dollar sign, flag, organized charity, movie star, Mother and the Holy Grail.

As The Belt of cars moves slowly across the stage diagonally, men and boys work monotonously, putting on parts, hammering, pushing drills and screw-drivers; fitting doors, wheels, steering gear, carburetors, radiators; tightening bolts; painting, etc.

The curtain rises on a dark stage. The noise is greatly increased and seems to continue to the end of the Act.

JIM

[Coming across the black stage from upper left in nightshirt, calling sleepily, but angrily, for his daughter.] Nance! Nance, why don't you go to bed? *[near the davenport.]* 'You know what time it is? . . . 'S half past two. . . . Nance! 'You here? *[Reaching for the light over the davenport.]* Nance! *[JIM switches on the light over the davenport. BILL and NANCE awake, gradually, and break their cramped embrace. There is a spot of light on the group. The rest of the stage is dark.]*

BILL

[Blinking.] Wha—what happened?

JIM

[Rapidly goading himself into a righteous fatherly rage.] That's what I want to know. You know what time it is?

BILL

[Groping for NANCE's wrist and her watch.] No, what time is it? *[He tries to focus his eyes on NANCE's watch.]*

NANCE

We fell asleep.

JIM

[Theatrically.] Nance, what's happened? Tell me!

BILL

[*Coming to.*] Nothing's happened.

JIM

[*Turning to BILL.*] Shut up. [*Again to NANCE.*] What happened, Nance? [*JIM puts his hand under NANCE's chin and tilts up her face to look into her sleepy eyes.*] It's half past two!

NANCE

Well, what of it? We fell asleep, that's all.

JIM

Nothing else?

NANCE

[*Impatiently.*] Certainly not!

JIM

Tell me the truth, Nance. [*NANCE hesitates.*]

NANCE

Why—n-nothing. . . . We like each other a lot, that's all.

BILL

[*Truculently.*] What you trying to insinuate, anyhow?

JIM

[*Now thoroughly suspicious and enraged.*] You know what I mean, you young smart-aleck. . . . If

it's true I'll break every damn bone in your body——
[*BILL half turns to NANCE with a laugh of contempt for JIM's insinuations and JIM ends shrilly.*] I'll kill you, d'you hear! . . . You can't come into my house and play hell with my girl and then lie out of it, just because she backs you up. . . . You've been here four hours, almost, when you oughta been home gettin' some sleep for tomorrow.

NANCE

[*Pulling at JIM's arm.*] Listen, dad, nothing happened. Nothing at all. We were just talkin' and I felt tired and the light hurt my eyes, so Bill turned out the light and, while we was talkin' and petting, we fell asleep. That's all.

JIM

[*His eyes still on BILL.*] That's the way with women—they always stand up for your kind and protect 'em. [*To BILL.*] What have **you** got to say?

BILL

Nance said it all. We was sittin' here, talking. After a while, she got sleepy and went to sleep and after a while I guess I musta dropped off, too. . . . There's not a damn thing for you to tear your shirt about.

JIM

[*Looking down at his bare shanks and becoming conscious again of the lateness of the hour and his*

own melodramatic, or comic, appearance.] Don't get funny! [*To NANCE.*] You like him?

NANCE

You bet.

JIM

[*To BILL.*] When you planning to get married?

BILL

[*Startled.*] Huh?

JIM

You heard me.

BILL

You don't believe us?

JIM

Not a damn bit. It's half past two. . . . You two were sleeping here in the dark. . . . Three hours anyway. . . . That's enough for me!

NANCE

Dad, don't you give me credit for any sense at all?

JIM

Not with him. Not after this. [*To BILL.*] Well, what about it? Say when. . . . I've seen your kind before, back in Illinois. You need a shotgun for a best man.

BILL

You can go to hell. . . . Maybe we'll get married and maybe we won't. That's between Nance and me.

. . . [*Pleading.*] Jim, can this movie stuff! Chees's, we just fell asleep, that's all. [*His voice rises with strain and hysteria, a partial hold-over from his uncomfortable sleep.*] You know how it is to be sleepy. Every night it gets you about nine o'clock. . . . Nance and me are younger. We can stand it until about eleven. Then it gets us. Chees's, you know—workin' all day, keepin' up, not a damn minute to rest, just doin' your stuff, four hours straight with the pushers ridin' you—speedin' up——

JIM

[*Sleep creeping upon him.*] Yeah, but——

BILL

That's it! Goddam it, you know! Ten years. You ought to know it—the Iron Man, Chees's, if **you** don't know, nobody does—what it is to be sleepy at night—— [*JIM, waves of sleep assailing him, sits on the davenport, BILL talks on, staring ahead across the stage, speaking in a high monotone.*] Day and night, three shifts, steady as the fires of hell, running smooth, faster, faster, more cars, lower prices, more sales, higher wages, maybe, a cut of the profits! . . . when you're too damn tired to do anything with them—if you get them! . . . And The Old Man running around the country talking about old-fashioned dances and charity and mass-production—mass is right!—look at us—— The years you've stood it. . . . The **Iron Man**. . . .

Some of 'em fall asleep in the street car. Harry Peterson fell asleep in the telephone booth tonight, telephoning his girl to break a date because he was too tired. . . . Look at Nance, so tired she can't dance. . . . Twenty-four hours it keeps moving, more cars, more wheels, more doors, more radiators, more transmissions, more piston rings, more batteries, more paint, more men knocked out in the testing room or hit on the head on pay-day by one of the guys from the penitentiary. . . . Ten years! . . . And I've only been going six months—it's getting me! [BILL's voice rises, NANCE leans forward, staring with him.] It's getting me! I didn't mean to fall asleep, honest I didn't! [They are all staring dully across the stage.] That's the truth. I thought I could beat it. Chees's, I'm a man. I'm strong—but it's gettin' me!

JIM

[Growling sleepily.] What's getting you? What the hell you talkin' about?

BILL

[Starting, pointing to the upper center of the stage and screaming.] It's THE BELT, *The Belt*, the God-damned everlasting BELT! The Race Track, The Madhouse—the Galloping Wild Men! Look at 'em! [A reddish violet haze dimly reveals *The Belt* and the WORKMEN. The WORKMEN move swiftly, adroitly, yet listlessly, talking to themselves between periods of hammering on and off-stage.]

[*Continuing.*] Look at 'em! Can't you hear it moving? All night and all day! Look at it! Oh, God, can't you see it! [*BILL stares wildly for a time, then he, NANCE and JIM slowly sink back to sleep in the davenport and the spot fades into blackness. Meantime the reddish-violet haze brightens to a ghastly blue. Not all the WORKMEN speak.*]

FIRST WORKMAN

[*Putting on a fender from a pile.*] Say, Frank, who's the broad?

SECOND WORKMAN

[*Boring hole with push-drill in framework.*] Which one?

FIRST WORKMAN

The one that picked you up yesterday at the gate?

SECOND WORKMAN

Somebody's wife! Met her at a dance when I was on the day shift. . . . Chees's, she's wearin' me down! . . . Didn't get to sleep until noon yesterday.

THIRD WORKMAN

Yeah, thatsa good one!

FIRST WORKMAN

Some baby, huh!

SECOND WORKMAN

She's got a swell place. . . . Maybe I could frame it for you with a friend of hers. . . . How about it?

FOURTH WORKMAN

[*To* FIRST WORKMAN.] How about it, George?

FIRST WORKMAN

[*Embarrassed.*] Nope.

SECOND WORKMAN

Why not! They're safe. . . . Charity!

FIRST WORKMAN

I'm married. [*General laughter.* *PUSHER enters.*]

PUSHER

[*To* FIRST WORKMAN.] Snap out of it. You're holding things up. . . . Gotta keep 'er going.

[*Workmen bend sullenly to their work, casting furtive glances of hatred at the PUSHER until he goes off, right.*]

FIFTH WORKMAN

—and I cleaned up six hundred and twenty on those three lots . . . woulda got more, but hell! The market's gotta break some time.

SIXTH WORKMAN

. . . See the boss talkin' to me last night when I was quittin'? . . . He said I wasn't puttin' the primers in right—the goddam testin' room squealed. . . . If the pay wasn't so good, I'd a quit right then.

SEVENTH WORKMAN

Whaddeya mean "good pay"? Lucky if we get four days a week after this price-cuttin' rush is over. . . . Lucky if the plant's still open! . . . Whatja tell him?

SIXTH WORKMAN

"Gimme a little time an' I'll get it right," I says. "You don't want mechanics around here. What you want is a bunch of jumpin' jack soda jerkers, ex-convicts and stick-up artists."

FIRST WORKMAN

Like hell you told him that!

FIFTH WORKMAN

That won't get you nothin'. You gotta yes that grafter along or he'll give you the air. Lookit what he did to that guy that squawked about havin' to buy lunch and then gettin' laid off for the day five minutes after half past twelve. . . . You gotta yes that bird along or he'll get you! . . .

SEVENTH WORKMAN

[*Coldly, ironically.*] Where'd you get that stuff! 'You willing to take everything they dump on you, just for a chance to stay in this damn murder-factory—huh? Fred's right. . . . Give 'em an argument once in awhile. . . . Good wages won't buy you no water in hell.

[*PUSHER enters right, crosses to SEVENTH WORKMAN.*]

PUSHER

[*Standing over the SEVENTH WORKMAN.*] What's your number? [*SEVENTH WORKMAN puts thumb under number-badge on his chest.*] Cut out your lip, get me! Snap out of it. Show a little speed. Goddam it, what's the matter with you guys! [*He stands over them a moment, then exits left.*]

FIFTH WORKMAN

[*Cautiously.*] . . . I got some stuff from over the border. Pre-war Scotch, twenty-four dollars a case. . . . I keep it at my brother-in-law's. . . . The office sent a welfare worker around after the checker smelled some on my breath when I showed up the other night. . . . The lousy, double-faced son of a——

SECOND WORKMAN

[*Harshly.*] Thatsa good one! I spotted him at a roadhouse a coupla weeks ago with a blonde—drunk as an owl—did I tell ya 'bout that?——

ALL

[*In chorus.*] Hell yes!

SIXTH WORKMAN

This new model is a bird. Streamline, blue with natural wheels, makes seventy easy . . . got four hundred for the old bus and seventy-five down. The missus drove eighty miles yesterday on five gallons—not bad. . . . Hell, what's the hurry, what's the hurry?

FIFTH WORKMAN

. . . We're goina look at a place out in the country next week—garage and exclusive territory—if the price is right we'll move out an' take it easy—I gotta beat it fast or I'm due for the hospital. [*Stopping, putting out hand.*] Look at that piece of meat—damn screw-driver's hell, puts a hole right through a glove, anything—guess something's matter with my skin—

SECOND WORKMAN

—and then she says: “Daddy, I ain't no vegetarian——”

[*Laughter.*]

SIXTH WORKMAN

[*Reeling.*] Goddam this job, anyhow. . . . What's the speed? They're sure shovin' them along tonight!

SEVENTH WORKMAN

Four hundred and sixty. . . . What's the matter?
Can't you make it?

SIXTH WORKMAN

Aw, go to hell. . . . What pen' did you come
from?

SEVENTH WORKMAN

[*Smiling.*] Wrong, buddy. I'm not the guy that
got your coat.

FIFTH WORKMAN

[*To SEVENTH WORKMAN.*] Cut out your wise-
cracks, you!

SEVENTH WORKMAN

Me? What's the matter?

FIFTH WORKMAN

You're a son-of-a-bitchin' radical, that's what
you are. A trouble-maker.

SEVENTH WORKMAN

[*Threateningly.*] You're a lying damn stool
pigeon. . . . You ain't got nothin' on me, at that.
. . . . I just hand myself a laugh at you guys
workin' your tails off for nothing. [SIXTH WORK-
MAN *sways and staggers.*]

FIFTH WORKMAN

[*Pointing to SIXTH WORKMAN.*] He's passin'
out.

[SIXTH WORKMAN *crumples up on the floor.*]

FIRST WORKMAN

[*To* SECOND WORKMAN.] Ring for First Aid, you.

SECOND WORKMAN

[*Pressing a button and returning to work.*] I ain't what I used to be, I'll tell the world that, or I'd a taken her up on that. . . . This job is sure hell!

[*Two* WHITE-COATED MEN *come in with stretcher and carry out* SIXTH WORKMAN.]

FIFTH WORKMAN

Chees's, it sure gets you, don't it? . . . How long's he been here?

SECOND WORKMAN

'Bout a year. . . . Came from the country. . . . Lost his farm. . . . Nice guy, too. Saved his money. . . . Just got a new car. . . .

FOURTH WORKMAN

Well, I'm goina beat it, soon as I can find a soft place. . . . This place gets you, huh?

SECOND WORKMAN

You said it. I damn near fell asleep drivin' home yesterday. . . . How much they doin' tonight?

SEVENTH WORKMAN

Four hundred and sixty. . . . What of it?

SECOND WORKMAN

[*A trifle dazedly.*] . . . A man's a goddam machine here, that's what he is. . . .

FIRST WORKMAN

. . . Women are hell. You can't make 'em listen to reason. . . . Wanta go drivin', fix things around the house. . . . I guess if they had to do eight hours they'd feel like sleepin'. . . . My wife——

FIFTH WORKMAN

Listen, everybody. . . . George's goin' to tell us about his wife! . . .

FIRST WORKMAN

[*Ignoring the expectant men.*] Well, soon's I get a little more in the sock, you won't see me around this dump any more. . . . [PUSHER *enters, left, unobserved.*] How much they puttin' out to-night?

PUSHER

[*Crossing to* FIRST WORKMAN.] Four hundred and sixty. . . . What the hell of it? . . . Goddam you, cut out the lip and get those garnish boards on. . . . What's the matter, you wanta quit? [*Pause.*] Do you? [FIRST WORKMAN *shakes his head and works fast.*] If you do, just open your face again. There's plenty of good men outside waitin' for your job. [*He turns to others, all*

working hard.] That goes for you, too. [PUSHER exits, right.]

SEVENTH WORKMAN

[*Mockingly, after a pause.*] You heard what he said—four hundred and sixty. . . . What of it? Whatcha kickin' about? Dontcha get good pay—five days a week—when you work—huh?

FIRST WORKMAN

[*Tensely.*] I'm going to get that bastard. . . . It's too damn much. . . . You'd think we was damn punch presses. . . .

[SPOT OF LIGHT comes up on davenport. BILL and NANCE are again asleep in each other's arms. JIM's collapsed in sleep at the other end of the davenport.]

SECOND WORKMAN

Damn this botch job. . . . Hope it gets by the testers. . . . What time is it? . . . They're certainly shovin' this stuff along tonight . . . huh? I'm all in. . . . Too much women, I guess. . . . Gotta cut it out an' get some sleep. . . .

SEVENTH WORKMAN

You said it, bo! Women and this kinda work don't go together. You make the machines an' they ride in 'em, that's all.

FIFTH WORKMAN

Pipe down, will you? Don't you ever get tired shootin' off your face with them stale wise-cracks, huh?

SEVENTH WORKMAN

Naw, I get plenty of sleep. Work and sleep, that's me. Save my money, that's me. . . . Some day this Belt's goina stop.

FOURTH WORKMAN

And shoot the bull. . . . That's all you do.

SEVENTH WORKMAN

That's right. . . . They're goina pull that over-time stunt again this morning. . . . Didja hear about it?

ALL

Some bull!

SEVENTH WORKMAN

You wait!

SECOND WORKMAN

. . . And I'd a married her, but she wanted me to throw up my job. . . . Chees's, she sure was crazy about me! . . .

[Slow Curtain on Double Scene.]

ACT TWO

Scene that of Act One, Scene I. The living room of the Thompson home. Same off-stage noise throughout, faintly.

The next night.

At rise of the curtain FLORA is standing at the open door to the street, upper right, looking down the street. As she watches for NANCE she eases her brassiere, smooths her clothes and otherwise betrays her habitual preoccupation. After a short time she obviously sees NANCE enter the street. She stares at her daughter with the envious curiosity of one who is reluctantly going away from the top of physical life. She hurriedly abandons the door, snatches her magazine from the table, seats herself and pretends to have been reading when NANCE enters, tired, hurried and distrait.

NANCE

[Entering at street door, taking off her hat, running fingers through her hair and crossing to her room to drop her hat and purse.] Hello, Ma. [FLORA sits still and ominous. NANCE continues unheeding.] Had to work overtime. [Pause.]

Mr. Cunningham—he's in the President's office—gave me a special letter and forty-seven addresses at one o'clock. [*Pause.*] From The Old Man, his signature—— [*Pause. NANCE, puzzled by FLORA's silence, comes into the center of the room.*] Why the Sitting Bull pose? What's wrong?

FLORA

[*With elaborate restraint.*] Had supper?

NANCE

Sure, had a swell dinner. Mr. Cunningham told me to sign his name for it—cost a dollar and sixty-five cents; filet mignon, cucumber salad, consomme, peach melba—God, I'm tired, though—back hurts.

FLORA

[*Nastily.*] Mr. Cunningham's thoughtful, isn't he?

NANCE

[*Going closer to FLORA and speaking raggedly.*] Say, cut out the dirty cracks, Ma. That was business. He had to get those letters out. He asked me 'cause I don't make mistakes—— [*Laughing and turning away.*] Not that it gets me anything except a free meal that's paid for here anyway. [*Long pause. FLORA stares at NANCE, who picks up the paper and pretends to read, but finally reacts to her mother's stagginess.*] Well, what's the idea? What's wrong? Do I look funny?

FLORA

Aren't you ashamed of yourself!

NANCE

No, why should I be?

FLORA

[*Lashing out.*] Nancy Thompson, don't use that tone to me. You know very well what I mean.

NANCE

S'posing I do—what of it? Why should I be ashamed?

FLORA

[*Softening, trying another attack.*] You poor child! [*She opens her arms dramatically.*] Tell me how it all happened!

NANCE

[*Turning to FLORA.*] What the dickens are you talking about, Ma? Nothing happened.

FLORA

After all, Nancy, I'm your mother, you know. You may as well confide in me. You ought to. . . . Besides, I may be able to help you two poor children.

NANCE

[*Alarmed and awake.*] Oh, you mean Bill and me last night! Is that it?

FLORA

Of course.

NANCE

[*Steadying herself and trying to be shrewd.*] What do you mean—"help us"? We don't need any help. What's the idea?

FLORA

Your father is awful angry. I never saw him so mad. He came home early. He was here when I got home. . . . You'd better be careful.

NANCE

Where's he now?

FLORA

[*Fearfully.*] Out in back, working on the car. I had it out driving this afternoon.

NANCE

With Frank?

FLORA

[*Stiffening slightly and hesitating.*] Why—yes, I met him on the street just as he was going to lunch.

NANCE

You'd better be careful!

FLORA

[*Haughtily.*] Mind your own business and you'll have plenty to do. [*Pointing toward the back.*]

I've never seen him so worked up. It scares me. Seems like something's broken loose in him. He's terrible!

NANCE

[*Laughing shortly.*] Pa! That's good!

FLORA

Don't laugh so loud or he'll hear you. He's wild, I tell you. Something's happened to him. You've done something to him.

NANCE

Me?

FLORA

[*Continuing.*] He didn't say a word at breakfast. I couldn't get him to talk. Afterward he went for his coat . . . and I found him standing there at your door, looking at you asleep in your bed with tears in his eyes.

NANCE

Dad!

FLORA

[*Pressing the point.*] I says to him: "Time to go to work, Pa," and he nodded. "I'll kill him," he says. He ain't said a word since. Just went to work without kissing me or anything.

NANCE

[*Turning half fearfully to the back door.*] I've got to talk to him!

FLORA

Wait a minute! Is Bill coming out tonight?

NANCE

[*Turning half away.*] Yes, I guess so.

FLORA

He better not. You better telephone him right now. It ain't safe.

NANCE

[*Laughing nervously.*] Why not? I can explain to Pa.

FLORA

[*Shaking her head.*] No you can't. He won't listen. He's sure Bill is guilty.

NANCE

Of what?

FLORA

You know well enough. And he's just crazy-mad because it happened like it did—him on the same couch. . . . That's what's driving him wild.

NANCE

How do you know?

FLORA

He was telephoning to Harry Tracy of the Lodge when I came in the house. [FLORA *lowers her voice.*] You're not supposed to know—but it's a

secret order Pa belongs to—they're going to get Bill. Lots of the men at the Plant belong. Pa told Tracy he'd come for him and the others if Bill showed up tonight——

NANCE

[*Breaking in.*] He's crazy! [*Wildly.*] Bill was talkin' about The Belt and we fell asleep—that's all. Then, afterwards, Bill woke up with a crick in his back and then—Pa and me went to bed, that's all!

FLORA

[*Smirking, coming up to NANCE and "confronting" her.*] Are you sure, Nancy? . . . You can tell me everything. I know you and Bill love each other and it's only natural——

NANCE

[*Thrusting FLORA away.*] Chees's, Ma, lemme alone! If Bill an' me wanted to go the limit we'd do it right! Not like this, you can bet! For the last time, I tell you nothing happened.

FLORA

Well, then, why are you so excited?

NANCE

Who wouldn't be excited—with you sniffing around like a hyena and Pa calling out the K. K. K.!

FLORA

[*Quickly.*] It ain't the K. K. K.

NANCE

Same thing, then. [*Turns to hall door, takes the telephone from the hall stand, brings it into the room and pushes the door to.*] I gotta telephone him. [*Lifts receiver, waits, gives number.*] Woodward, 1357—Yes—Hello—Mr. Vance—Yes—— [*While she waits, to FLORA.*] What a mess! . . . Pa must be cuckoo!

FLORA

He——

[*The door is pushed open. NANCE steps aside, JIM enters. He is a changed JIM—burning with a sullen blinding anger, nursing it. It is of ten years' accumulation. His eyes fix on FLORA and he walks slowly toward her as if to throttle her.*]

FLORA

[*Rising and stepping back in fear.*] Nancy's home, Pa.

JIM

[*Brusquely, without turning his head.*] Nance, get in your room and shut the door.

NANCE

[Into telephone.] All right. *[Drearily.]* No. . . . thank you. . . . *[She hangs up the receiver and starts toward JIM.]* Pa, I want to talk to you.

JIM

[Wheeling to face her and pointing to her room.] Get in there! *[Thoroughly frightened, NANCE tries to reach the door to the street.]*

NANCE

[Half way to the street door.] I'll go outside. I want to get something at the store.

JIM

[Quietly.] Get into your room and stay there.

FLORA

Aw, Jim, let her go. I want her to get some coffee for breakfast.

JIM

[To FLORA.] Shut up!

[NANCE turns and goes to her room, left center. FLORA, thoroughly frightened, retreats to her chair. After a short pause JIM turns to FLORA.]

JIM

Where'd you and Frank go this afternoon?

FLORA

Why, just driving. You see—I saw him on the street and he didn't have anything to do until four o'clock when he had a date to demonstrate——

JIM

[*Grabbing FLORA's wrist.*] Where'd you go?

FLORA

Just through the park, Jim. . . . Let go. . . . You're hurting me!

JIM

Did you get out of the car?

FLORA

[*In panic.*] Why, no—what made you think that?

JIM

You drove?

FLORA

Yes, of course.

JIM

Stayed in the front seat all the time?

FLORA

Jim, what are you insinuating? Of course I did! Frank's my cousin.

JIM

And you drove just in the park?

FLORA

Certainly. You see—he had to get back for the demonstration——

JIM

[*Throwing her hand down.*] You're a liar. [*Opening his other hand.*] How'd this hair and these pins and his pencil get in the back seat? Why'd you have the side-curtains up?

FLORA

[*Fumbling wretchedly.*] It looked like rain and——

JIM

You're lying. The sun was out all day.

FLORA

I don't know anything about the pins and that might be anybody's hair——

JIM

What about the pencil?

FLORA

[*Laughing nervously.*] What makes you think it's Frank's?

JIM

It's got his name on it. [*A full pause. Each stares at the other, realizing shipwreck.*] No damn wonder Nance did that—it's in the blood——

FLORA

[*Rising.*] Jim, you're crazy. Frank's my cousin. [*Beginning to sniffle.*] Oh, you can't believe that about me.—Don't you love me, Jim?

JIM

[*Dully.*] Don't lie any more, Flo . . . I guess I used to love you [*Flaring.*] Why do you do it? . . . You're all alike . . . fall for four-flushers like Frank or Bill. . . . [*He looks at her a moment.*] He's younger than me, got more money—but, gee, Flo, we been together so long— [*A little pause.*] I've worked like a damn machine for you. . . . Always trying to get ahead so's we could make a break——

FLORA

[*Seizing the advantage.*] If you only had. . . . Frank's got a business of his own . . . plenty of money.

JIM

[*Crazy-wild.*] Don't say Frank to me, you damn—— [*Pauses as he realizes a number of things.*] You—you've got nerve to throw him up to me! After going out in the woods with him and making love in my car like a damn chippie! While I'm breaking my back on The Belt earning money for your gas and your clothes and this house—you've got a hell of a lot of brass! Listen, I'll tell you why I never made a break—because you wouldn't

let me. You always had to have this and that and God knows what!—spent the money as fast as I earned it——

FLORA

[*Turning on him.*] I did not! . . . That isn't so. We've got four hundred and eighty-four dollars in the bank. . . . You don't need money to start on your own hook. . . . [*She hesitates a moment and then lets fly.*] What you need is nerve!

JIM

[*Baffled by her impudence.*] Damned if I don't feel like whipping you! Say something like that again and I'll do it!

FLORA

[*Reacting to his anger.*] Yeah, you wouldn't dare! You'd lose your job!

JIM

What the hell do I care for that?

FLORA

You can talk! . . . Why didn't you show a little interest in me before? . . .

JIM

Before what?

FLORA

[*Emboldened by JIM's indecision.*] Before Frank began showing me a good time.

JIM

[*With a gesture of finality.*] That's enough, Flo. You've finished it. [*He turns away.*] I'm going to get them both. Bill and Frank. After that—— [*A gesture of indifference and fatigue.*] I'll get square for once, if I get life for it.

FLORA

Don't be foolish. You can't do anything to Frank and——

JIM

Why not?

FLORA

[*Facing him.*] Because I won't let you. I'll tell him.

JIM

[*Sitting down, beaten for the moment.*] I'll—I'll tell what I know about him, by God! I'll get The Old Man to take his agency away from him. I'll make him leave town. And if I meet him I'll fix him. [*His hand goes to his hip pocket.*] You damn women!

FLORA

Yes, but what about **you**! Blame it all on us—what about Nance? She ain't to blame, not alone. . . . It isn't all my fault, Jim Thompson, not by a long ways——

JIM

[*Scornfully.*] You! What have you had to stand? You've had it too damn soft. . . . That's the only mistake I made. . . . I shoulda made you go back on a farm like I wanted to . . . kept you busy milking and having a few more babies. . . . You might not been so good looking, but you'd a been mine instead of any man's meat. . . . [*His eyes wander hopelessly a moment.*] You're right, it's my fault. I was a sap. Thinkin' I could keep you by workin' in the Plant, lettin' you buy clothes and furniture and vacuum cleaners and electric things so you could sit there and get wild ideas readin' dirty magazines all day.

FLORA

[*Sobbing again.*] I did love you, Jim, for all of it . . . until lately—just lately—but Nance grow-in' up and us gettin' old—not gettin' anywhere—you didn't love me any more.

JIM

[*Laughing harshly.*] Trying to be funny!

FLORA

No, I mean it—night after night you didn't pay any attention to me—just came home, eat supper, ask me what time it was and go to bed.

JIM

That ain't so. We had lotsa parties. . . . Didn't I drive a hundred and ninety miles Sunday? I woulda made up to you more—only you didn't want me to. You know that. What about the night after Decoration Day?

FLORA

You were drunk!

JIM

No, I wasn't—you had as much as me—treated me like I was a stranger—didn't you? . . . How about it?

FLORA

[*Breaking.*] Sure I did. That's what you are—a stranger. You aren't the Jim I married. That's it! You're somebody else! [*She backs away melodramatically.*] You're somebody else!

JIM

[*Crazily.*] You said it! I've got my eyes open now. [*As he looks at his watch.*] What time is it? . . . Ten minutes to eight. [*Again to FLORA.*] Is Bill coming out tonight?

FLORA

[*Her fright rushing back.*] I don't know. . . . You'd better keep away from Frank. . . . He'll kill you if you try to get him!

JIM

Scared, are you! You'd better be! Go and tell Nance I want to talk to her—and you, too.

FLORA

What happened last night, Jim? Are you sure you didn't make a mistake?

JIM

Plenty. Like mother, like daughter. You didn't raise her for nothing.

FLORA

It wasn't her fault.

JIM

That's right, maybe. He's more to blame than she is—but she was a fool to give him a chance—sittin' here in the dark with him.

FLORA

They're in love. Don't be too hard on her.

JIM

She may be; he ain't. Why did he sneak out if he was? . . . Get her!

FLORA

[*Goes to NANCE's door and calls softly.*] Oh, Nance. [*Pause. JIM motions to FLORA to call again.*] Nance! [*Pause. NANCE's door is jerked open, she appears dressed for street, hat on, coat and bag in hand.*]

NANCE

What do you want?

JIM

Where you going?

NANCE

I don't know.

FLORA

Come here and sit down. We want to talk to you.

NANCE

[*Putting bag on floor and crossing to JIM.*] So you think I'm a ruined woman, do you?

JIM

I want to talk to you. Sit down.

NANCE

[*Coming close to JIM.*] I told you last night that you were all wrong about Bill and me—Do you believe me?

JIM

[*Hardening.*] No. He took advantage of you. He's going to pay for it.

NANCE

[*Yanking down her hat and moving to pick up her bag.*] That's all I wanted to find out. I'm a liar. We don't need to talk any more. I'm mov-

ing out. [*She walks toward the street door with bag.*]

FLORA

[*In a loud voice.*] Nancy Thompson, put down that bag and listen to your father!

NANCE

[*Making a face at FLORA.*] I'm going. [JIM crosses to NANCE, grabbing her bag and dropping it on floor by table.]

JIM

No, you're not. Don't be a fool. . . . What's all the hurry, Nance? Are you meeting Bill?

NANCE

[*Obviously lying.*] No, certainly not! He's got to go to a meeting tonight.

JIM

Well, we'll see. If he ain't, you may as well wait for him here as at a hotel—or the railroad station.

NANCE

I wasn't——

JIM

Wasn't what?

NANCE

Going to do that.

JIM

Uh huh, he's given you the air already? . . . I thought you said he was crazy about you?

NANCE

He is—that is, he hasn't given me the air—oh, what I mean is—he's on the level and all your dirty ideas about us are a lot of lies. Bill and me understand each other—— [*Turning to FLORA.*] Yeah, you think that sounds like a story, but it's true.

FLORA

I didn't say I didn't, Nance. Pa and me are just trying to look after you. that's all.

JIM

[*Looking directly at NANCE.*] Listen, Nance, answer me just one question: Why did he sneak out last night?

NANCE

He didn't.

JIM

Yes, he did. While we was asleep. He knew I'd a made him talk turkey if he'd woke me up.

NANCE

[*Desperately.*] He didn't sneak out.

JIM

How do you know? Did he wake you up to say he was beating it while the beating was good? [*Nance hesitates.*] Did he—huh?

NANCE

That don't make any difference. You wait and see. He's on the level.

JIM

You mean you're going to get married?

NANCE

[*Cutting loose.*] No, I don't mean getting married! Why should we get married?

JIM

[*Easily.*] Don't you love him?

NANCE

[*Caught off balance, she recovers.*] I don't see that that's any of your business—but, if you want to know, I do—and he does—he told me so.

FLORA

Last night?

NANCE

None of your business.

JIM

[*Brushing FLORA aside.*] Well, then, what's the objection to getting married? [NANCE *fumbles and says nothing.* JIM *continues triumphantly, and with returning rage.*] Uh huh, just like I thought—he ain't asked you—has he?

NANCE

Not just that way—not yet. . . . But, damn it all, Pa! Keep your hands off, will you! . . . Bill an' me will get through all right . . . if you an' Ma'll just give us credit for a little sense. . . . We know where we stand. . . . We got our own lives to ruin an', if we make a slip, we'll do all the crying out loud. . . . But we won't! . . . You don't seem to understand that Bill ain't like other men we know. He's big. He's got big ideas and he can't get married without figurin' things out first.

JIM

[*Scornfully.*] You mean he ain't big enough man to marry you after he's spent the night on the couch with you! By God, I'll make him act like a man! He'll marry you or be damn sorry he didn't when he had the chance! . . . What's the idea? Why can't he make up his mind? Maybe you aren't good enough for him!

NANCE

That's a five and ten cent store remark!

JIM

[*Quickly.*] When's he coming out?

[NANCE, *off-guard, glances nervously at the clock, then catches herself.*]

NANCE

Why—what makes you think he's coming at all? [*Short pause.*] Maybe he's beat it out of town already.

JIM

No, he hasn't. I found out. He left his boarding house an hour ago—he ought to be here pretty soon.

NANCE

[*Panicky.*] How do you know? [NANCE *glances entreatingly at FLORA.*]

JIM

Oh, I know, all right. I'm ready. Thank God, there's still some men in this country with hundred per cent American ideas that ain't afraid to act quick when some yellow belly takes advantage of American womanhood!

NANCE

[*Wildly fearful, reaches for her bag and starts to the street door.*] Oh, my God! I've got to get out of here! [JIM *blocks her way.*] Get out of my way!

JIM

No, you don't, Nance. You gotta stay here.

NANCE

[Screaming and trying to get to the door to the street.] Lemme go, do you hear! Bill didn't do anything. . . . I gotta go. Lemme out! Damn your dirty minds. . . . I never want to see you again! . . .

JIM

Easy, Nance!

NANCE

Lemme out of here! I gotta find Bill—Marry, what the hell do I care about that! . . . I won't let you get your hands on him! Lemme out! *[NANCE beats on JIM and sobs.]*

JIM

[Going to street door and locking it.] There, there, Nance! . . . It's just like I thought. He's got you locoed.

NANCE

[Wildly, hopelessly.] Lemme go! Oh, I want to go away! . . . Never see you again. . . . Lemme go!

JIM

[Continuing, including FLORA.] If he doesn't marry you, I'll blow the top of his head off.

[Doorbell rings. All jump. JIM unlocks and opens the door. BILL enters, as before, with a rush. NANCE grasps bag, runs to him to push him out, as JIM falls back in momentary confusion.]

NANCE

Bill! Go away! Take me away! Quick!
[Pushes him into doorway.]

BILL

What's the trouble?

NANCE

[Blindly.] Get my bag. I want to go away.
Hurry!

BILL

[Crossing and picking up NANCE's bag.] All right, Kid. Whatever you say suits me.

JIM

[Knocking the bag out of BILL's hand.] Leggo that bag, Nance ain't goin'. . . . Not unless you're man enough to marry her.

BILL

Who says so?

JIM

I do.

BILL

[Turning to NANCE.] That right, Nance?

NANCE

[*At the door.*] No. Let's get away. That's all I want. Don't mind him.

JIM

Nance, shut up. [*To BILL.*] Well, what you goin' to do?

BILL

Nothing. I came out here to see Nance, that's all. . . . [*He notices how wrought up JIM is.*] You still got that idea you had last night.

JIM

[*Shaking with anger.*] Don't sass me, you damn smart-aleck! I found out about you to-day. Plenty! You're a trouble-maker, a radical, besides being so low-down that you take advantage of any girl who hasn't got enough sense to see through all your big talk.

BILL

Where'd you get this? What's it got to do with Nance?

JIM

They're on to you down at the Plant, don't you worry! They've got the goods on you, all right. You been going to radical meetings downtown, haven't you?

BILL

What of it?

JIM

Never told us anything about it. . . . Went to college, too, didn't you?

[NANCE and FLORA are startled. So is BILL, for a different reason.]

BILL

[Crossing to JIM.] Who the hell told you? Where'd you get all this?

JIM

That's all right where I got it. It's true, ain't it?

NANCE

[Awed.] Is it, Bill? Did you go to college?

BILL

Chees's! And they call this a free country. What the hell difference does it make? [To JIM.] You got that from that damn Patterson or one of his snoopers, didn't you?

JIM

Maybe. Anyway, I got enough. But that ain't the point. You goin' to marry Nance or ain't you? You better if you know what's good for you.

BILL

What's the idea? I don't get you.

JIM

It won't be healthy for you. For one thing, your job won't be worth a nickel—but you won't need to worry about that!

BILL

Why not?

JIM

[*Continuing.*] I've got old-fashioned ideas about young men like you—and there's other men right handy who feel the same way.

NANCE

But, Pa, that's all bunk about Bill and me. [*To BILL.*] Tell him, Bill. He won't believe me.

BILL

What's the use! He's crazy.

JIM

[*To NANCE.*] There you are! He don't deny it! He knows I wasn't blind when I caught you last night.

NANCE

Bill! Tell 'em! Tell 'em about us! You got to!

BILL

He wouldn't get that line of talk. [*To JIM.*] You think the Plant's all right, don't you?

JIM

Better men than you stand it without kickin'—never mind all this highbrow talk! What you going to do?

FLORA

[*To BILL.*] You ain't married to somebody else? [*BILL shakes his head and smiles.*] Well, why don't you marry Nance? Isn't she good enough for you?

NANCE

Ma, keep still, will you?

JIM

How about it? Is she?

BILL

[*With slightly ironic moodiness.*] Too good! I like her too well. That's the trouble.

[*Short pause.*]

JIM

[*Relieved, slapping BILL on the back playfully.*] Why didn't you say so! That's different! . . . We're all young once. . . . How about it—when do you want to get hooked up?

BILL

[*In a level tone.*] Jim, you don't get me. I don't want to get hooked up. That's the hell of it. I am a trouble-maker, a hell-raiser—maybe I'm a—what you might call a radical. You think the Plant's a good place to work—

JIM

I never said that——

BILL

Anyway, you've been there ten years—ten years longer than I'd ever stick. [*Half turning to NANCE.*] Nance knows how I feel. I haven't told her everything yet—maybe I will. Then if we feel like sticking together, maybe we'll get married——

JIM

[*Craftily, to NANCE, hands on her shoulders, his back to BILL.*] You love him?

NANCE

[*Smiling and nodding.*] Sorry, Pa, looks like it.

JIM

[*Quietly—half turning to BILL.*] Lemme get this straight. [*To BILL.*] You love Nance?

BILL

Yes.

JIM

You might marry her—maybe?

BILL

Yes, after we've figured things out—if she wants me.

JIM

But you won't promise?

[*Pause.*]

FLORA

Please, Bill!

BILL

[*To NANCE with a smile.*] How about it, Kid?

NANCE

[*To JIM and FLORA.*] We can't know. How can we promise? We don't know!

JIM

[*To BILL.*] Yes or no?

BILL

No.

[*JIM stares at BILL and NANCE a moment.*

NANCE moves restlessly, fearfully. JIM goes to her and strokes her hair affectionately.]

JIM

[*To NANCE, looking at BILL.*] That right, Nance?

NANCE

[*Nodding her head.*] Yes, that's right.

JIM

[*Going to back door to hall, turning there to speak to BILL.*] Er—Bill, will you wait here just

a couple of minutes, you and Nance? I'll be right back. [BILL, *puzzled, makes no reply.*] Will you?

[NANCE *pulls at BILL's arm.*]

BILL

Why, yes—— All right!

[JIM *exits.* FLORA *goes to the front window, looks out.*]

NANCE

[*Going to BILL.*] Let's go, let's get away quick!

FLORA

[*At the window.*] You'd better hurry. He's going down the street—to telephone.

NANCE

[*To BILL.*] It's dangerous!

BILL

[*Putting his arm around NANCE and kissing her.*] What's dangerous?

NANCE

He's wild. You don't know!

BILL

No, he isn't. I made him understand. He knows how it is. All that pipe-dream about doing wrong by our Nell is bunk. He knows it.

NANCE

[*Angrily.*] Why didn't you say so, straight out, to him!

FLORA

[*Turning from the window to BILL.*] Yes, why didn't you?

BILL

You think we're guilty?

FLORA

Yes, I do.

NANCE

Ma!

BILL

[*To FLORA.*] There's some people you can't argue with. They put themselves in the same situation, figure out what they'd do—and you're a liar or a fool if you tell 'em they're wrong. Like the Judge who said only one thing could happen when a man and a woman stayed in a hotel room for half an hour. See?

FLORA

[*Flustered.*] But——

BILL

[*Ignoring NANCE's anxiety.*] But what? What's your idea about it? [*FLORA crosses and slaps BILL's face.*]

FLORA

That's what I think of you. You're too smart. [*Pause.*] I think you're two young fools and you'd better clear out in a hurry before Jim comes. Things have come to a fine pass when a daughter won't confide in her own mother. [*To BILL.*] I want to help you two babies. Jim's mad. You don't know him like I do. He's madder than I ever saw him before.

NANCE

[*On a chance hunch.*] About you and Frank, too?

FLORA

[*Taken aback, falters, then admits—a little.*] Yes, partly.

[*NANCE's fear increases.*]

BILL

[*Patting FLORA's shoulder.*] No, he isn't. What makes you think that? He couldn't do anything. . . . I told him I'd wait. . . .

FLORA

That's it. It's a trap. He's gone to get the men. I heard him fixing it when I got home. It's a secret order. They're going to "get" you.

NANCE

Bill, if you love me, let's go!

FLORA

He was telephoning when I came in to Tracy. He's the Grand Commander.

BILL

Tracy! You sure!

FLORA

Yes, and he's got a gun. I saw him trying it out in back.

NANCE

[*At the street door.*] Bill, come on! Please!

BILL

[*Crossing to NANCE and taking her by the shoulders.*] See! It's like I told you. Always something coming up. It's no use running away. If we beat it, something else will get us later on. . . . Let's stay and see what happens! . . . How about it? . . .

NANCE

[*Moaning.*] Oh, Bill, if you knew how much I love you——

BILL

[*Holding her tight.*] Me, too! But that's it again! It makes goddam cowards of so many men. . . .

FLORA

You ain't got much time. He'll be coming back.

BILL

[*Pleading with NANCE.*] Nance, let's stick! We're bigger than the whole damn bunch—when they're together. I know the gang. They're from the Plant. They won't do anything. You watch. It's The Belt makes them get this way. They don't know it, but it's so. I'll give 'em an earful now. . . . [*His excitement mounts.*] I don't give a damn—It's a good chance! . . . [*He laughs.*] Patter-son's got my number! He's been waiting for a chance to give me the gate, right! Here's where he'll get it! Maybe more. [*To FLORA.*] You think I'm crazy, don't you?

FLORA

[*With sarcasm.*] Oh, no! Go ahead and kill yourself! I don't care!

BILL

Well, I'm not. [*To NANCE.*] Listen, Nance, I don't know whether you've heard it or not. Hell's going to break loose at The Belt pretty soon. Any time! There's a lot like me—like I was tellin' you last night. We're ready. We're waiting to get word on one thing that'll make Tracy and his gang go stark, raving mad! Get me? It's been a long time comin'. Tonight don't make any difference to me. It's a good chance to get their eyes open a little. . . . [*Eagerly.*] How about it—are you game?

[*Sound of cars stopping outside, in the street.*]

NANCE

[*Leaning toward BILL, flowerlike—in fear and love.*] Oh, Bill!

[*They embrace, lost in each other's eyes.*]

FLORA

[*Going swiftly to the street window.*] They're here! Oh——

[*JIM, automatic in hand, bursts in the back door, upper left, followed by other men. They come in slowly, solemnly, and stand around the room. They are reminiscent of jurors.*]

JIM

[*As he enters.*] Here they are!

[*JIM halts. Other men, led by TRACY, enter at the street door, upper right. Tableau. BILL and NANCY spring apart and face the men defiantly. JIM steps forward toward BILL.*]

FLORA

[*In a moaning wail of entreaty.*] Be careful, Pa!

JIM

[*Savagely, turning on FLORA.*] Why in hell should I? You keep out of this! [*He turns to BILL.*] Now, you yellow-bellied snake. . . . [*BILL stands motionless, watching JIM's eyes.*] I'd just as soon put a bullet in your heart as not.

BILL

[*Quietly.*] The hell you would. [JIM *jerks forward, brandishing his gun.*]

TRACY

[*Jumping forward, pushing JIM aside.*] Easy, Jim! Just a minute! [*Going close to BILL, as NANCE falls back a step.*] Vance, Jim says you got his daughter last night. What's *your* story?

JACOBSON

[*An excitable little man in the crowd talks shrilly.*] Say, Bill, iss dot true—vat dey say? Huh?

[*Others angrily nudge him to be still.*]

CARLSON

[*To JACOBSON.*] Shut up!

SECOND VOICE

Throw out the Yid!

THIRD VOICE

Go ahead, Tracy. Let's have a li'l action!

FOURTH VOICE

Chees's, ain't it enough! D'juh see what he was doin' when we bust in! . . .

FIFTH VOICE

Yeah, right in front of the old woman!

[FLORA, in background of scene, winces.]

[As scene continues, more people, men, women, boys, girls, filter into the room until it is jammed, with a crowd outside.]

TRACY

Talk straight, Vance. We ain't here for foolin'. Jim says you and his daughter slept here last night—Yes or no!

BILL

[Coolly.] I'll say yes and no to that, Tracy.

THIRD VOICE

That's enough! Bring him out!

TRACY

[Raising his hand.] These men are sore. Don't get gay—yes or no?

BILL

No—for what you mean. Yes—to the actual fact.

[THE MOB surges toward him.]

JIM

[Shaking and shrill with anger.] See, he admits it.

BILL

[To JIM.] No, Jim, you're wrong. I don't admit anything, more than this:—

FOURTH VOICE

Look out, Tracy, he'll talk you out of it! He's a college guy!

FIFTH VOICE

Let him talk!

THIRD VOICE

Go on, tell us your bed-time story—— [*Suppressed snickers and guffaws back in the crowd.*]

TRACY

What's your alibi? Let's hear it.

BILL

It's all a damn lie——

THIRD VOICE

Ain't it the truth!

BILL

Here's what happened: I had a date with Miss Thompson last night. I was late—got here just as The Old Man was leavin'. We danced a little and then we sat here—[*pointing to the davenport*] and talked. We were sleepy—Nance works at the Plant, too, you know—so, while we was talkin'—we went to sleep. . . . Then Jim comes out and sees us and gets the idea that I——

JIM

Yeah—who turned out the lights? Huh!——

BILL

I did——

FOURTH VOICE

Yeah, you would!

[*Laughter.*]

NANCE

I asked him to. I was tired. My eyes hurt.

[*More laughter—fainter.*]

JIM

[*To TRACY.*] C'mon, let's take him out.
Chees's, how much proof do you want?

TRACY

[*To BILL.*] And you were here in the dark?

BILL

Why, yes. There was the light from the street.

WOMAN'S VOICE

[*At street door, to neighbors.*] He says there
was the street light——

TRACY

[*To JIM.*] What time did you find 'em?

JIM

Two o'clock—right here, on the sofa, and——

TRACY

[*Turning to NANCE.*] That right, Miss Thompson?

NANCE

What of it? We didn't do anything wrong. What business is it of yours, I'd like to know?

SECOND WOMAN'S VOICE

[*Back in crowd at door.*] You poor girl! [*To NEIGHBORS.*] They always stand up for 'em.

FIFTH VOICE

Let's go.

SECOND VOICE

C'mon, bring him out!

TRACY

[*To BILL.*] What you going to do—get married, or go with us?

BILL

Meaning what?

TRACY

Plenty. You'll never show up in this town again.

CARLSON

We're next to you, Vance. You kept your radical ideas dark, but we're wise—after what happened in the test room this morning.

BILL

What's that?

CARLSON

Yeah, that's a good stall! You doped the gas so's it knocked out the whole gang.

BILL

That's a damn lie. Where'd you get that? From Patterson?

CARLSON

Never mind. We got the goods on you. You're a damn bolshevik, and we're going to get shet of you—this— [*waving his hand to take in the scene*] this just makes it easy. We haven't got room here for anybody who ain't a hundred per cent our kind. We tie the can to the trouble-makers—that's what we're for.

TRACY

Shut up, Carlson.

JACOBSON

Bill, is dot true? Are you a bolshevik? Huh?

BILL

[*Addressing TRACY, deliberately.*] Now we're talking sense! You're doing The Old Man's dirty work—is that it? . . . Well, you tell Patterson he's full of apple sauce—I live on my wages, same as you. I leave it to you men if I ever made trouble on the job. . . . How about it—Peterson, how about it?

PETERSON

[*Uneasily.*] That ain't it. They say you got a secret organization that's trying to organize——

FOURTH VOICE

Yeah! And pull a strike!

SECOND VOICE

A damn agitator, that's what he is!

JIM

He don't think the job's good enough for him—that's what he said last night! [*Turning to THE MOB.*] What the hell's the use of all this talk! He's stalling.

BILL

No, I'm not, Jim. [*Smiling.*] I'm getting educated!

JIM

[*Infuriated by the smile and waving the gun at BILL.*] Don't kid me, you damn smart-aleck. Wipe that damn smile off your face or I'll blow your head off!

BILL

[*Crossing to JIM, speaking deliberately.*] No, you won't. [*Pause. WOMAN in crowd shrieks. BILL turns to MOB.*] You men have a hell of a lot of nerve, coming up here to run me out of town because The Old Man's snoopers want to get rid of

me. Where do you get that stuff! Don't you do enough work for Him at the Plant without doing his dirty work nights, too?

THIRD VOICE

This ain't work; it's a pleasure!

BILL

[*Continuing.*] You know as well as I do who Patterson's workin' for—he's workin' for The Old Man. He gets paid for keepin' you quiet and seein' to it that you do six days work in five, and keep cutting the cost of production. No booze, no parties, get married, stay home, save your money—and keep working! That's what he's here for. That's what he's got his stool pigeons all over the plant for. Take a knock at the boss and you get a mark on your card in his office. Knock him again and you're fired.

FOURTH VOICE

How do you know so damn much? You working for him?

BILL

No, but maybe you are. Take it from me about Patterson. I know. He's got dicks all over the place. You can't open your face without one of them hearin' you. Try it and see. Sound off on the job tomorrow about not gettin' paid for overtime. Tell somebody The Old Man gets two hundred and thirty hours work a day free by double-crossing

at quittin' time. [*He pauses a moment, then adds:*] Ask someone what The Old Man's going to do when the Works shut down!

FIFTH VOICE

Yeah, that's a hot one! They ain't never shut down.

THIRD VOICE

You're damn right they have!

FOURTH VOICE

[*To THIRD VOICE.*] Show's how much you know. Ain't you never worked two days a week?

TRACY

[*Ironically.*] Tell us some more, Vance. Go on and hang yourself!

BILL

Why not! This ain't the only job in the world, like you guys think. Look at the way you hang on and fight for the right to work. Where the hell do you get off? Good money, maybe, when you work! But what of it! The Belt takes the life out of you. You last two years, if you're lucky, without goin' to the hospital. . . . Look at Jim—the Iron Man—ten years on The Belt got everything but his health and his independence! You're all the same, haven't got the guts to call your soul your own. What do you get out of it? The Old Man says you get a chance to be promoted. Sure! Break

your back and you'll get promoted—make other guys break their backs. Like Jim. He was foreman. Boston beat us two months—and he's puttin' on doors again. At that, he's stuck longer than most of us! [*Faster.*] The Old Man's lookin' for boys—high school kids—that's to speed up—cut production cost—make you keep a-humpin'. Plays them against you—plays every plant against all the others. Pushing! Ask Jim—he knows. Slave driving—that's what it is. . . . If you don't like it—out with you—bum's rush—you're a bolshevik—a trouble-maker—you ain't "one hundred per cent American." And you guys fall for it! Eat it up and yell for more!

JACOBSON

[*Excitedly.*] He sounds like Voikers of de Voild Unite——!

CARLSON

[*Punching JACOBSON.*] Shut up, you damn kike!

BILL

[*To JACOBSON.*] That's old stuff, Jakey. [*To all, whimsically.*] How many of you men have fights with your wives?

[*Unwilling laughter among the men; shrill among the women.*]

THIRD WOMAN'S VOICE

All of 'em, the dirty bums!

BILL

Well, most of you. Didn't you ever figure it out?
It isn't their fault.

FOURTH VOICE

The hell it ain't!

[*Laughter.*]

BILL

And it isn't your fault.

FOURTH WOMAN'S VOICE

[*With other jeering women.*] Is that so?

BILL

It's just that you're all too damn dumb to get wise to the fact that The Belt is pulling the life out of you! [*Silence, pause.*] Get me? . . . You aren't men. You're just damn machines. You don't know how to handle a woman. She ain't a machine. You can't turn a switch and start her loving you and turn it off when you please. She's a human being. She figured she married a man and when he turns into a machine she raises hell. She thinks you're a dead one, that you don't love her any more. You think she's cuckoo—and that's when the fight starts.

FIRST WOMAN'S VOICE

That's right, kid.

[*Laughter, dying quickly.*]

BILL

Sure, you're both to blame—because you blame the wrong guy. [*Short pause.*] It's The Belt. It's sucking the guts out of us! We ain't men; we're goddam machines. When the gears wear out—get another pink-cheeked kid from the country to take your place! . . . And then you stand up and cheer for The Old Man when he says: "Work a little faster, boys, and I'll show you how to do the old-fashioned dances!" [*He laughs.*] God, you hand me a laugh!

TRACY

[*Ironically.*] What else?

JIM

[*Poking the gun in BILL's stomach.*] Come on, get out of here!

[*BILL jerks the gun out of JIM's hand, breaks it open, laughs, shows empty clip to the CROWD.*]

BILL

[*To JIM.*] I thought so! Pulling a bluff—
[*Partly to the CROWD.*] That's what The Belt does to you! Jim was sore at me—sore as hell. Said he'd blow my head off—But he said it with an empty gun! Ten years ago he'd have put cartridges in it. The Belt's got him! [*To JIM.*] You were afraid you'd get life for murder, weren't you, Jim?

JIM

[Breaking down and snivelling.] Damn you, damn you! I couldn't find the shells! No, I wasn't afraid! I'll show you if I was afraid! *[He attacks BILL with his fists, sobbing and screaming.]* You dirty crook! I'll kill you!

[BILL clinches him easily. JIM collapses.]

FLORA

[Going to JIM and leading him away.] Let him go! C'mon, Jim.

[He starts to go with her, looks up, recognizes her, remembers Frank, stiffens, draws away, slaps her.]

JIM

You, too, damn you!

[Shrieks, gasps and clucks of sympathy with FLORA in THE CROWD.]

TRACY

[Brusquely.] Here, cut that out! *[He catches JIM, who is sagging, and with the aid of FLORA and A WOMAN from THE CROWD, takes him back into the crowd.]*

BILL

The Belt did that to them. Ask Nancy. She'll tell you.

THIRD VOICE

Keep the girl out of it, you lying bastard.

NANCE

Yeah! "Keep the girl out"—But you can't. I'm in it. We're all in it, up to our necks. It's like Bill says—I leave it to the women—what's a man good for after he comes home from work—nothing! Lies around the house, don't want to go anywhere, do anything, see anybody. Goes to sleep if you get him to a movie. They can't get a kick out of a party unless they're lit up with booze—and then they slobber all over you.

FOURTH VOICE

[*Mockingly.*] Where'd you get so wise, Kid?

NANCE

Don't get fresh with me, you sap. I know my stuff. Hasn't my dad worked on The Belt for ten years! He used to be a regular guy! Look at him now! [*She turns to BILL.*] Bill's different.

[*Laughter and snickers.*]

SECOND VOICE

Go on, Kid, tell us about it!

FIRST WOMAN

[*At door, to others outside.*] The girl says her sheik is different.

[*Laughter outside.*]

FIFTH VOICE

Yah! He's different!

NANCE

[*Lashing out at them all, men and women.*] Sure he is! He's a man—an honest-to-God man! The Belt hasn't got him, yet! It ain't going to—see! He's going to beat it. He's got something besides bone in his head. That's why I fell for him. [*Jeers, laughter.*] Yes, damn you—I'll tell the world I did! He was a sight for sore eyes after seeing you bums that think The Old Man runs the world. He's got life. You poor fish ain't got nothin'! No pep, no punch. . . . Look at your women—they run you ragged. Spend your money and make fun of you behind your back! . . . Like Bill says—You can't even raise good kids—look at 'em. They run you ragged, too. You can't do nothin'—except gang on a real guy when he gets into the place by accident.

[*Jeers from the men, laughter and nudging among the women.*]

TOUGH GIRL

[*At the back.*] You tell 'em, Kid. The only thing they got is money—and they're damn tight with that!

THIRD VOICE

Chees's, listen to the broad!

NANCE

She ought to know! [*Turning to TRACY.*] Listen, Mr. Tracy, I'm ninety-nine and four-tenths per cent pure—I'm a virgin—if that's what's worrying all you birds—but it ain't Bill's fault! [*She turns defiantly, on them all.*] Bill can have me any old time, wedding or no wedding. That's what I think of him!

[*Shrieks from the women.*]

FIRST WOMAN'S VOICE

[*At the door, to those outside.*] She says it ain't his fault she ain't ruined.

NANCE

Yeah, that's the truth! Bill knows it. Chees's, why don't you guys get hep to yourselves! You can get regular girls and keep 'em—if you didn't think more of The Belt than you do of us. Like Bill says, we want lovin', lots of it—not just money—and we'll go through hell for the man who can give it to us. Take it from me! I know how it works. Bill's right, you're just machines. Ask your wives if I ain't right.

SHRILL VOICES

That's right, girl! . . . Don't I know it! . . . I wish Jack was here to get an earful! . . . That's the stuff, Nancy!

NANCE

[*Continuing to the men.*] And you take it and beg 'em for more. Yes, you offer to kill real men like Bill when he shows you up—just because he makes good on the job, beats you to the girls, and don't think The Old Man's God Almighty——

JACOBSON

[*Admiringly.*] Ah, vot a spieler! I should be back in Union Square, maybe!

NANCE

[*Gasping for breath.*] Just one more little gum drop: What happens after you do all this—after you break your backs on The Belt—— [*She pauses and adds melodramatically*] You work yourself out of a job!

[*BILL starts. Jeers from the men.*]

FIFTH VOICE

Guess again, sister!

THIRD VOICE

Take another shot!

FIRST VOICE

Yeah, we heard that before!

NANCE

[*Wild and a bit fearful.*] Yeah, well, laugh it off this time. It's true! Ha, ha! That's a hot one! Ain't it? What you going to do about it?

BILL

[*Gripping* NANCE.] Where'd you get that? What made you say that? Are you sure it isn't half-time? That's what I was telling you—but shutting down! . . . Where'd you hear that?

NANCE

[*More frightened.*] Why—I can't tell you—but—but it's true. The Plant's gonna shut down Saturday.

TRACY

[*Roughly.*] Where'd you get that? Talk up! [*Confusion grows, swelling murmur in THE CROWD, becoming a mob.*]

FIRST WOMAN'S VOICE

[*Shrilly to those outside.*] She says the Plant's gonna shut down Saturday.

[*Growing murmur outside.*]

TRACY

[*More panicky.*] Talk up—where'd you hear that? [*Women push forward in THE CROWD.*]

BILL

[*His face alight.*] Chees's, Nance, you've got to come through! Where'd you get that dope? [*Lower.*] That's what I told you about—what we was waitin' for!

NANCE

But, it's confidential! . . . Do I have to tell?

FIRST WOMAN'S VOICE

[*To those outside.*] She says it's confidential.

FOURTH VOICE

She works in the Front Office. Maybe she's got a straight tip!

BILL

Go on, Nance, spill it! It's just like I told you! Hell's gonna break loose. Tell 'em all about it.

NANCE

All right! [*To the crowd.*] This is straight: The Plant's going to shut down Saturday until further notice. That's coming out day after tomorrow. [*Murmurs, swirls of talk.*] But this isn't: They're closing down because the market's filled. They figure they've got eight hundred and fifty thousand more cars than they can sell—that much ahead—The Old Man was going to cut the price again but they wouldn't let him——

TRACY

[*Wildly.*] How do you know? How do you know so damn much? Where'd you get this? [NANCE *hesitates.*]

BILL

Shoot it, Nance. Where'd you get it? [*To CROWD.*] It's God's truth. I know it. But I didn't know it was coming so soon. . . . [*To the Crowd.*] Now, who's a trouble-making fool, huh?

FOURTH VOICE

Gwan! I don't believe it. Let the dame tell us where she got it!

[*Others murmur, argue more heatedly among themselves.*]

NANCE

I'll tell you where I got it—from The Old Man!

SECOND WOMAN'S VOICE

Yah, that's likely!

NANCE

I had to work overtime on 'em tonight—a confidential letter to plant managers, district managers. His office was rushed—so they passed some of the letters out to me. They go like this: "Effective Friday midnight, July 6, all mining, lumbering, manufacturing and assembling in this organization

will be suspended until further notice. You are privately advised for your own information and guidance that work probably will not be resumed for at least nine months. Make no statement for publication; refer all inquiries to main office. This action is taken to conserve the best interest of the industry"—and a lot more that I forget. I had to see that they went by air mail.

BILL

[*Laughing loudly.*] Ha, ha! Doesn't that break you down, men! "Best interests of the industry"—nothing doing for nine months—well, let's go up to The Old Man's house and wipe the tears away from his eyes. How about it?

ANGRY VOICES

Yeah! Fat lot he cares!

BILL

And if he breaks down and tells us it hurts him more than it does us—[*His voice hardens.*] we'll tell him he's a damn liar.

CARLSON

[*With too much emphasis.*] You said it!

BILL

Think it over. You got nine months' vacation without pay! Why don't you take a trip to New

England and get a job in The Old Man's hand-painted blacksmith shop making rings out of horse-shoe nails! Three cheers for The Old Man, the Plant, the Belt, Straight Line Production, Efficiency and the Open Shop!

[*Loud murmurs, anger, swirling fear and groping in THE MOB.*]

THIRD VOICE

You mean to say we ain't goin' to draw no pay for nine months?

FIFTH VOICE

[*Ribaldly.*] Sure. Get married and start a family while you're resting. The baby can cut his teeth on the steps of the poorhouse.

FIRST WOMAN

[*Confronting NANCE.*] Nance Thompson, are you tellin' the truth?

NANCE

So help me God, Mamie!

THIRD VOICE

Chees's! Next Saturday we're through!

FIFTH VOICE

I'm going to beat it, quick. [*Several start to leave.*]

BILL

Wait a minute. [*They pause in breaking up. A few hurry out.*]

TRACY

[*To BILL.*] How the hell do you know so much about it? Who're you?

BILL

I'm a nut, a radical, a bolshevik, a trouble-maker. I don't know when I'm well off—I was one of those guys that beefed about The Old Man and made you guys sore by asking you what the hell you were getting out of it while The Old Man was makin' a billion, and where'd you get off at when the bubble bust and people got so oversold on every damn thing under the sun that they couldn't pay any more first installments—I'm one of those looney bozos that said you were workin' yourselves out of a job—just like all the other hundred per centers who believe in the right to work and starve to death, depending on the Boss. Hell, you remember me, Tracy!

[*HENDRICKS, a big, forceful man, who has been quiet in the background, moves toward BILL.*]

HENDRICKS

[*To BILL.*] Cut out that stuff, Kid. That don't get us nowhere. [*To CROWD.*] Ain't that right?

THIRD VOICE

Yeah, that don't buy us no beans.

FIRST WOMAN'S VOICE

Let's go to The Old Man!

CARLSON

[*Sneering.*] Fat chance!

FIFTH VOICE

Yeah, you can't get within a mile of him!

HENDRICKS

[*Bellowing in the manner of an experienced labor organizer.*] Men, are you going to take this lying down?

BILL

Sure they are!

TRACY

Shut up, you damn wise guy.

HENDRICKS

By God, I'm not! We can't let The Old Man get away with this stuff. He always said he was smart enough to keep the Plant going and we took his word for it—even when we only got two days' work a week. Now he's slipped on his neck—but we're the ones that get hurt.

CARLSON

Well, what you going to do about it?

FIRST WOMAN

That's what I say. Let's have a little action!

THE MOB

[*Cheering.*] You said it! . . . Let's go up to his house! . . . Little action! . . . Attaboy! . . . Come on! . . . Now you're talkin'!

BILL

[*Sneering.*] You haven't got the guts!

TRACY

[*Menacingly.*] I'll break your goddam head if you don't keep still.

[*BILL laughs at TRACY.*]

HENDRICKS

[*Answering THE MOB.*] Yeah, that's what I was going to say. The Old Man's got a reputation for being good to us——

[*Cat-calls.*]

VOICES

Yeah! . . . He's good all right! . . . Works our tails off! . . . Kids us along! . . .

HENDRICKS

[*Jumping up on a chair and taking charge thoroughly.*] Now you're talking. . . . I'm for you. But it's no use going up to His house. He ain't home. He's down at the Works. He's been down there every night, late. That's the place to get Him! [*THE MOB falls silent, attentive.* HENDRICKS *plays them like a violin.*] Here's our demands: Keep the Plant running or shut it down and give us half pay. Why the hell not! He made the mistakes, built too many cars—we didn't! Why should we pay for it? That right?

VOICES

That's right. Tell it to 'em! Let's go. . . . Make him pay! . . . That's right.

HENDRICKS

Whatdya say? Are we going down there? [*A dead pause. They are taken aback, a bit fear-*

ful of The Belt.] Come on! We made that Plant; he didn't. Why the hell can't we go in! The cops are right. That's fixed.

FOURTH VOICE

To hell with the cops!

HENDRICKS

We gotta beat Him to it. We gotta throw the fear of God into Him. Get this: He don't give a damn about His house, or His spinning wheel or His grist mill or His old furniture, nor any other damn thing except The Belt. That's what He's crazy about. . . . That's where we gotta hit Him!

SIXTH VOICE

Yeah! . . . Hit Him in The Belt! . . . That's a good one!

[Laughter—cheers.]

HENDRICKS

Hit first and talk afterward, that's what we gotta do! We'll hit Him tonight and talk to Him tomorrow. Then keep on hittin' Him. Never let Him get set. See? How about it?

CHORUS OF VOICES

Yeah!

Let's go!

Hit him in The Belt!
Goddam the Works, anyhow!
Let's go!

HENDRICKS

Here's the dope: Vance gets some more men and their women down by the river. They'll meet us by the gate. Everything's fixed.

FOURTH VOICE

'Atsa stuff! Goddam the Plant, we'll take it apart!

BILL

[*Slipping into HENDRICKS' place.*] Like hell you will! Listen. No use trying to bust things open on The Belt. That won't buy shoes for the baby. . . . Not now! We'll go inside—you gotta leave the rest to me. Remember, no rough stuff goes! That'll get the papers down on us and give The Old Man a chance to use machine guns and gas.

FOURTH VOICE

[*Shrieking.*] He wouldn't dare!

BILL

Bring the women along—all you can get!

THIRD VOICE

We'll go!

FIRST MAN

[*Starting out.*] Saturday, hell! Tonight! Here goes!

BILL

[*Holding them a moment as HENDRICKS waits in the doorway to the street.*] Don't forget! Nine months; no pay. Remember all the extra time they sweated out of you for nothing, the fines, the damn lousy lunch graft of the foreman; the checkers takin' your names at the toilets—— [*He looks at HENDRICKS, who gives him a sign to start the parade. His voice rises almost to the cracking point.*] God-dam it, remember you're men! Get up and walk on your two hind legs and we'll spit in The Old Man's eye! [*He steps down, the crowd yells and surges out to the street.* TRACY, downstage, beckons CARLSON to him. *They talk furtively and part.* TRACY follows CARLSON out to the street.]

NANCE

[*Throwing her arm around BILL.*] Come on, Bill. Chees's, this is great! [*Her voice swells above the clamor of the moving crowd.*] I'm yours, Bill, now and forever! [*To the WOMEN.*] Come on, girls—grab yourself a man—and come on! [*She and BILL stand aside as the crowd flows out, cursing, laughing, jostling, breaking into pairs.* NANCE laughs at a shuffling group of men and boys, pushes

them out the door.] Go on, get yourselves some girls! Tonight's your night—for once in your lives! [Laughter.]

BILL

Easy, Nance, we may get bumped off. [NANCE stares at him a moment, then throws back her head and laughs proudly, fearfully, as they go to the door.]

[JIM is revealed sitting in a daze on the davenport, watching an insane little world rocking to a fall.]

BILL

[Pulling NANCE out as JIM tries to rise.] C'mon, Nance, we gotta hurry!

Curtain

ACT THREE

Scene same as for Act One, Scene II—The Belt. Same noise, same WORKMEN doing same tasks with the same tired adroitness, shouting same talk. The Belt is drenched in bluish-white light. Front stage is dark.

Half an hour later.

FIFTH WORKMAN

That's funny. . . . All these real estate guys is tryin' to unload. 'Member those lots I told you about—made six hundred and twenty—well, the guy tried to crawl out on his contract and I——

FOURTH WORKMAN

Yeah? That's funny! He musta got stuck.

FIFTH WORKMAN

That ain't all, either. The papers is full of bargains—cut prices on lots—for cash. . . . Looks funny. . . . Glad I got out.

SEVENTH WORKMAN

[*Slyly.*] Maybe money's gettin' tight.

SECOND WORKMAN

—Well, I gotta ditch that dame this time, all right—Ain't had any sleep for two days—not to speak of——

FIRST WORKMAN

Yeah, that's a good one! That's what you said last night—I noticed you climbed into her car just the same!

SECOND WORKMAN

This time it goes! . . . I think her husband's coming home. . . . I drank up most of his beer—good beer it was, too! [*To WORKMAN.*] How 'bout it, want to get a knockdown to her?

FIRST WORKMAN

[*Embarrassed.*] Not for me! No leavin's for me!

FIFTH WORKMAN

That's right, George! [*General laughter.*] You're married. That's your story and you stick to it.

FIRST WORKMAN

Chees's, these damn carburetors'll fall out if you look at 'em, almost. . . . They ain't got mechanics around here! . . . Not even in the goddam testin' room—just a lot of high school kids—soda jerkers—that's what they are! Farmers! Hicks! Saps! Dumb-bells!

SIXTH WORKMAN

Yeah? Somebody's got brains, though! They keep sellin' the cars, don't they? We keep drawin' our pay, don't we? You should kick!

SEVENTH WORKMAN

Maybe you do! Maybe you don't! How do you know how long you'll have a job? . . . Maybe they ain't sellin' so well!

FIFTH WORKMAN

[*Threateningly.*] Cut out the crabbin'. What the hell's the matter with you! Always givin' us the anvil chorus. Sell your hammer and buy yourself a horn, why don't you?

SEVENTH WORKMAN

That's not a bad idea. . . . But I wouldn't have time to play it. . . . Work, eat, sleep, go to work, that's all! Except the time it takes me to count my pay and take it to the bank before some of the ex-convicts around here bend a pipe over my dome.

SIXTH WORKMAN

Somebody's going to turn you in for your damn wise-cracks some of these days, you goddam radical.

FIRST WORKMAN

How many they puttin' out tonight?

SIXTH WORKMAN

I dunno. . . . Purty fast, ain't it! Chees's, it sure got me last night! I slept all day. My head was like a sausage grinder full of barbed-wire. . . .

FIFTH WORKMAN

Hey, Frank, got a swell pair of dames dated up. . . . Wanta take one of 'em?

SECOND WORKMAN

Yeah, don't care if I do. . . . Gotta shake a dame at the gate first, though. . . . Good stuff?

FIFTH WORKMAN

Yeah—swell. [*Pause. FIFTH WORKMAN turns to FOURTH WORKMAN apologetically.*] I'm all set to get a place in the country—if the price is right. . . . You get good pay here, when you work steady! . . . But, Chees's, how they take it out of you—huh?

FOURTH WORKMAN

Yeah, that's what I'd a liked to do—but my oldest kid wants to go to college—guess I told you he didn't make West Point.

FIFTH WORKMAN

Naw! Chees's, that's tough! When'ja hear?

FOURTH WORKMAN

Day 'fore yesterday. Fell down on chemistry, or somethin'. . . . How much they puttin' out tonight?

SEVENTH WORKMAN

Four hundred and seventy. . . . What's the matter? Too fast for you?

FOURTH WORKMAN

Purty fast, ain't it?

SEVENTH WORKMAN

[*With elaborate sarcasm.*] Naw! We gotta cut down the cost of production so's we can beat Boston—Didn't you see that chart showing Boston leading? We gotta hum. . . . You guys don't seem to get the right spirit about your work!

SIXTH WORKMAN

Goddam you and Boston! What the hell do we care for that bull on the chart!

FIFTH WORKMAN

[*In alarm.*] Hey! Hey! You! Cut that out! The Spotter'll get you.

SIXTH WORKMAN

[*To SEVENTH WORKMAN.*] Keep your damn mouth shut, d'you hear?

SEVENTH WORKMAN

All right, bo. . . .

SECOND WORKMAN

—Chees's, if it wasn't for the women, I'd quit this lousy job right now. They keep you broke. . . . How many they puttin' out tonight?

SIXTH WORKMAN

That's what I'd like to know! God! It's movin' fast, ain't it?

FIFTH WORKMAN

—Well, I'm goin' to look at a place next week-end and, if we take it, I'll lean back and hand myself a good laugh at you guys workin' your heads off for somebody else.

SEVENTH WORKMAN

That's damn nice of you!

FIFTH WORKMAN

[*Fiercely.*] Why not? Why shouldn't I? Listen, Trotsky, I worked here five damn years and saved my money—that's why I can get a farm.

SEVENTH WORKMAN

Yeah, you saved your money! That's a lot of bologney! Bootlegging! Why don't you tell the truth? You're prob'ly pullin' out to go into makin' the stuff, at that!

[*BILL, alone, quietly steps one pace in lower right, and stands motionless in the dark fore-stage, easy, watching the workers, who are unconscious of him—except:*]

SIXTH WORKMAN

[*Pointing listlessly at BILL.*] Got visitors.

FIRST WORKMAN

[*Looking blankly toward BILL, then pityingly at SIXTH WORKMAN.*] Visitors, hell! You oughta took tonight off.

[*TRACY, alone, steps quietly in one pace at opposite side of dark fore-stage, and stands motionless, and furtively watches BILL. Both BILL and TRACY are silhouetted against light of The Belt.*]

SIXTH WORKMAN

[*Seeing TRACY, and starting.*] Don't you see somebody there? [*Pointing.*] Another?

FIRST WORKMAN

[*Not bothering to look toward TRACY.*] Chees's, this place has sure got you! You better quit before the white-wings come and scoop you up again, take it from me!

FOURTH WORKMAN

How much they puttin' out tonight?

FIFTH WORKMAN

[*To SEVENTH WORKMAN.*] Say, what if I did make somethin' on the side with some good Canadian stuff? Ain't this a free country?

SIXTH WORKMAN

[*To* FIRST WORKMAN.] They're visitors all right! Somethin's up! . . . I can tell!

SEVENTH WORKMAN

[*Answering* FIFTH WORKMAN.] I'll bite—is it?

FIRST WORKMAN

Forget it, kid. You better punch the clock and beat it, I'm tellin' you. There ain't no visitors gets in here. Not nights. You'd have to get an act of Congress to crash the gate—There ain't no visitors comin'.

SIXTH WORKMAN

[*Reeling at his work.*] God, that's funny! Somethin's up. . . . They sure make you put out at this job!

[*BILL turns and beckons to the crowd of MEN, WOMEN, BOYS and GIRLS. THE MOB breaks on stage, swiftly, silently, by twos and threes. It is electric with a fierce, stealthy gaiety. Quick gestures, flashing teeth. MEN and BOYS nudge the giggling WOMEN and GIRLS. They point and jeer silently at the WORKMEN, who remain unconscious of the mob in the gloom.*]

[*Continuing, after a wild staring pause.*] Chees's, it sure makes a difference! Shovin' it up! [*Shrieking hysterically.*] Goddam Boston! Those guys must have a hell of a boss down there, huh?

[THE MOB *increases in size, gaiety and assurance, kidding in whispers and laughing softly as it ranges itself at the edge of The Belt.*]

SECOND WORKMAN

—The second time I passed her I kinda slowed up and she gave me a tumble. “I wonder if you can tell me of a good hotel,” she says just like that! [*Belly laughter by the other WORKMEN.*] Well, you know me!

FOURTH WORKMAN

. . . and, tomorrow, I’m going to set out the late tomatoes and cabbages. The tomatoes . . .

FIRST WORKMAN

[*Slamming at his task.*] . . . Nothin’ but a god-dam tin-mill! . . . If the pay wasn’t so good . . . and they didn’t always say there’ll be full time purty soon . . . I’ll be damned . . .

[*Saxophones, banjos and trombones appear from under coats and arms in THE MOB and are limbered up. More laughter, nudging, pointing, kidding, whispering.*]

FIFTH WORKMAN

[*To FIRST WORKMAN.*] Aw, what you kickin’ about! You talk like we was makin’ watches! Get wise—you should worry. . . . Let The Old Man do that.

[Softly played jazz and furtive dancing break out at the sides of the stage, more laughter, and pointing in derision.]

FIRST WORKMAN

And I says to her: No more movies for me. Go on if you want to; I'm goin' to hit the hay. . . . Damned if she didn't!

FOURTH WORKMAN

Listen, everybody! George's goin' to tell us about his wife! *[To FIRST WORKMAN.]* And then what?

FIRST WORKMAN

[Smiling broadly.] Gowan! None of your damn business!

[The jazz and dancing increase, as do the laughter and general noise of THE MOB.]

FOURTH WORKMAN

. . . My kids goin' to be a lawyer. . . . That's the easiest way to make money I know of. . . . Chees's, I know a guy that didn't have enough brains to pound sand in a rat hole when I knew him! . . . He got into law, somehow . . . and now he's damn near a millionaire!

BILL

[Advancing to center of the stage and edge of The Belt, as THE MOB drops jazz, talk and laughter to silence.] Hi, there, Steve! *[SEVENTH WORKMAN*

pauses and listens as if he had heard faintly.] Hey, there, Steve! [*He waves his arm above his head.*] Hi!

SEVENTH WORKMAN

[*Seeing BILL and starting with joy and mounting excitement.*] Well, well, look who's here! [*Waves to BILL and THE MOB, who all wave back at him, as one, eagerly, tensely.*] Hi, there!

THE MOB

[*As one.*] Hi, there!

FIFTH WORKMAN

[*Scared stiff, to SEVENTH WORKMAN.*] What's bitin' you?

SIXTH WORKMAN

[*To SEVENTH WORKMAN.*] You cuckoo, too?

SEVENTH WORKMAN

No, look! [*Pointing at THE MOB.*]

[*The WORKMEN look, see THE MOB for the first time. They go weak and pale with fright, passing into agonized self-consciousness as they continue working automatically. Light goes up slowly on THE MOB downstage.*]

FIFTH WORKMAN

[*Out of the corner of his mouth, to SEVENTH WORKMAN.*] Say, what the goddam hell is up, bo?

SEVENTH WORKMAN

[Slamming away at his task joyfully.] Aw, nothin'! The jack rabbit is haulin' off to knock the rattlesnake for a row of brick and cast-iron latrines, that's all!

[Jazz is resumed. SEVENTH WORKMAN sways to it as he works.]

FOURTH WORKMAN

[Shaking with terror!] My God, what's happened!

FIRST WORKMAN

[Also afraid.] Shut up. Keep workin'. Maybe this is one of The Old Man's stunts! Keep workin'.

FOURTH WORKMAN

[Working hard, but looking sidelong at the JAZZ PLAYERS and a few of THE MOB who have started dancing at the edges.] Yeah, maybe that's it! Keep workin'. Gotta keep workin'. Can't tell.

BILL

[Gaily, to SEVENTH WORKMAN.] Hey, Steve, what you doing? Makin' your fortune?

[THE MOB laughs stridently. Its talk, laughter and jazz rise to full tones. The music forms a stronger background for the action.]

SEVENTH WORKMAN

[Laughing to the jazz, as he works.] Ha, ha. That's a hot one! *[Ironically, to FELLOW WORKMEN.]* Don't mind them! *[Pointing to MOB.]* They must be drunk!

[WORKMEN look with frightened eyes at THE MOB. The DANCING MOB sways and parts in the middle, leaving the FIRST GIRL dancing provocatively before The Belt.]

FIRST GIRL

Yeah, we're drunk, are we? *[To SECOND WORKMAN.]* Hello, Sheik! Where you been? What 'you doin'? Workin'?

SECOND WORKMAN

[Sheepishly, to FELLOW WORKMEN.] She's a frail I had a date with. . . . Straight. . . . I ditched her. . . .

SECOND GIRL

[Coming to center and waving to FIFTH WORKMAN.] Hello, Harry! Come on an' dance! I ain't seen you since last winter—where you been?

[BILL, TRACY and HENDRICKS talk together at side. NANCE enters and stands near BILL.]

FIFTH WORKMAN

[Sheepishly.] Yeah! That's your hard luck, ain't it!

THIRD MAN

[*In Mob.*] Yeah, look at 'em! Workin' their thick heads off! [*To WORKMEN.*] Hey, take a rest! You're workin' yourselves out of a job!

BILL

[*To SEVENTH WORKMAN.*] Say, Steve! Don't mind us! We just celebratin'. . . . And waiting. . . .

SEVENTH WORKMAN

Yeah? What you celebratin'?

FIFTH WORKMAN

[*Snarling to SEVENTH WORKMAN.*] Shut up, you damn radical! [*To MOB, with desperate bravado.*] Where'd you guys come from?

BILL

[*To SEVENTH WORKMAN.*] You know!

SEVENTH WORKMAN

[*Stopping dead in his work.*] Honest!

BILL

S' help me God!

SEVENTH WORKMAN

Wheeyowee! [*He throws back his head, yells, starts laughing, whoops, slaps his leg, keeping time to music which assumes a more accentuated jazz beat.*] Wheeyowee!

FIRST WORKMAN

[*Savagely.*] Hey! Hey! Nix on that stuff!
Keep workin'.

FOURTH WORKMAN

[*Pitifully scared.*] Yeah, we gotta keep
workin'.

THIRD WOMAN

[*To MAN IN CROWD.*] C'mon, Mike, let's show
'em something—that Black Bottom [*or equivalent*].

MIKE

[*Obeying, coming forward and singing at her in
blues time, mockingly, yet with a happy sensuous
under-beat.*]

Oh, Baby! I done lost my job!
Oh, Honey, I jus' want to sob!
I want to spend my jack,
Do a hot lot of steppin'—
To make my Gal come back!

THIRD WOMAN

[*As SECOND WORKMAN, and others, watch her
and other dancers furtively while working more
slowly.*]

Oh, Daddy, you ain't got a pay-day!
Oh, Daddy, you still got your lay-day!
You ain't got a cent!
You done lost you' pay-day
—But I can pay the rent!

[With dance steps and twisting.]

Oh, Daddy, you cain't spend your jack,

'Cause you show me the lovin'

That makes your Gal come back!

[Both repeat together.]

SECOND WORKMAN

[With a yell.] Hot Lady! Get away from here!
Can't you see I'm workin'!

FOURTH WOMAN

[Dancing invitingly before WORKMEN, as OTHERS sway with her.]

What's the use of workin'

When work is never done?

What's the use of savin'

When spending's all the fun?

What's the use of daylight

When you never see the sun?

What's the use of dreaming

—The way your job is run?

THE MOB

[In strident chorus.]

Come on! Come on!

Let 'er ride!

Come on! Come on!

Let it slide!

Throw the job over,

Because, like Rover,

[*Shouted.*]

Your job is a hot dog now!

[*THE MOB repeats the chorus. The WORKMEN stop to watch and listen. JIM and FLORA enter, stand at side.*]

SECOND WORKMAN

[*To FOURTH WOMAN.*] What's the plot, sister?
Lemme in on it!

BILL

[*Stepping to The Belt.*] That's it! Rover is a hot dog now! . . . [*Silence.*] The Plant's closing down Saturday.

[*Silence.*]

WORKMEN

[*In chorus.*] Who said so?

BILL

That's straight.

FOURTH WORKMAN

[*Starting for Bill, with long Stillson wrench in hand.*] Who says so? Who told you that?

FIFTH WORKMAN

Yeah, who the hell let you in here? [*Hysterically.*] Where's the foreman? . . . Throw him out!

FIRST WORKMAN

[*Turning savagely on FIFTH WORKMAN.*] Pipe down, you sap!

NANCE

[*To* FOURTH WORKMAN.] I told him. It's true!

[FOURTH WORKMAN *looks in* NANCE's eyes, is convinced, his shoulders slump and he returns to his post and resumes work. Meantime:]

FIRST WORKMAN

You mean we're going to be out of a job!

JACOBSON

[*Bubbling excitedly.*] Yeah, Voikers of de Voild, unite! You ain't nothin' to lose but your chobs—und dey're lost already!

FIRST WORKMAN

Chees's!

SECOND WORKMAN

What the hell's the big idea?

FIFTH WORKMAN

Yeah, that's what I wanta know—what's the idea?

FIRST WORKMAN

How'd you get in here?

SIXTH WORKMAN

What ya goina do?

[*A SAX PLAYER blows a derisive moan at the WORKMEN. The BANJOIST picks his strings and pats his foot impatiently.*]

FIFTH WORKMAN

You'd better beat it before The Old Man hears about this!

BILL

[*Laughs.*] Yeah! We're lookin' for him. . . . Where the hell is he?

THE MOB

[*Shrilly.*] Yeah! Bring on the Boss! Where's The Old Man? Bring him out!

FOURTH WORKMAN

[*Pitifully, trying to continue his task.*] They're going to shut down?

FIFTH WOMAN

[*Consolingly.*] Sure, what's the matter? You crazy about this job, Gran'paw?

FOURTH WORKMAN

[*Looking up at her.*] . . . I've got to have money. . . . My folks . . . my boy's goin' to college. . . .

FIFTH WOMAN

[*Laughing, turning to others, including Jim.*] Ain't that too bad! His boy's goin' to college—And now he ain't.

JIM

[*Lurching toward her.*] Shut up! You don't know anything! [*To* FOURTH WORKMAN.] That's all right, Fred. Maybe we can get 'nother job. . . .

HENDRICKS

[*To* WORKMEN.] Might as well knock off. C'mon. We're waitin' here awhile.

[*THE MOB dances. WORKMAN leaves his post, gets a girl and joins. SEVENTH WORKMAN looks on, smiling.*]

FIFTH WORKMAN

[*At his post.*] What's the idea? . . . [*Yelling.*] Get the hell out of here, you bums!

TRACY

[*To* FIFTH WORKMAN, *speaking slowly and with a peculiar inflection.*] It's the truth, Jack. They's shutting down for nine months. But, take it easy.

[*BILL looks quickly at TRACY, then at HENDRICKS, who is staring at TRACY. The WORKMEN pause, gasp, reel slightly and unconsciously, let go a sigh that is more a groan.*]

FIRST WORKMAN

[*Suddenly bending to his task.*] Hey! Look out! Here comes the Foreman!

[*All WORKMEN jump to their posts, resume tasks. The Belt speeds up again as the FOREMAN, a regulation "Pusher," appears. The Crowd, still dancing, greets him with jeers and yells.*]

SECOND MAN

[*From MOB, where he is dancing with a GIRL.*] Yeah, look at the slave-driver! Pipe the fink!

FOURTH WOMAN

[*Shrilly.*] Look at the floor-walker!

FOREMAN

[*Frightened, therefore with great authority, to the WORKMEN.*] What's all this, huh? [*The WORKMEN are silent.*] Huh? What's the trouble? You men are holding up the whole Belt. We're way behind!

FIFTH MAN

[*In MOB, calling in high falsetto.*] Oh, dearie, ain't that too bad!

FOURTH MAN

[*Stepping forward, toward the FOREMAN.*] What the hell of it?

[*BILL motions him back.*]

FOREMAN

[*To the WORKMEN, in nervous high voice.*] Snap out of it! [*Turning to FOURTH WORKMAN.*] What's wrong here?

FOURTH WORKMAN

[*Working desperately.*] Nothin'.

FOREMAN

[*To FIFTH WORKMAN.*] What's the trouble?

FIFTH WORKMAN

[*Daring greatly.*] They got some propaganda that The Belt's closin' down Saturday.

[*The FOREMAN is nonplussed.*]

FOURTH, SIXTH AND EIGHTH WORKMEN

[*In anxious chorus.*] Is that true?

FOREMAN

[*Stuttering.*] No! No! [*Turning helplessly and with growing fright.*] Who the hell started that?

THIRD MAN

[*Back in THE MOB.*] The Old Man!

FOREMAN

[*His back to MOB.*] That's a lie, men!

THIRD MAN

Yeah! So's your Old Man!

FOREMAN

[*Still addressing the WORKMEN, and edging toward the side.*] Men, we've got to keep up the rec-

ord! Four hundred and seventy. The Old Man's depending on us! [*Coaxing.*] I leave it to you if it's fair to the other men on The Belt——

SIXTH MAN

[*In Mob.*] . . . to push 'em so damn hard!

FOREMAN

[*Continuing in a higher tone.*] . . . to lay down on 'em like you've done tonight. [*He approaches the side.*] Loyalty, men. That's all we ask! Loyalty! The Loyalty that made The Belt what it is to-day! [*As he exits HENDRICKS works round to stand behind TRACY, and CARLSON in turn carelessly falls in behind HENDRICKS.*] Snap it up!

[*Saxophones blare and snort at the FOREMAN's back, the WORKMEN slacken almost to the stopping point, THE MOB dances, jeers and coaxes afresh. BILL notices HENDRICKS' position, and CARLSON watches them all, turning with a start when——*]

NANCE

[*Jeering at the FOREMAN and THE BELT.*] You made us what we are tonight, we hope you're satisfied!

THIRD WOMAN

[*To SECOND WORKMAN.*] Come on and dance, Sheik! You goina work all your life? C'mon! [*SECOND WORKMAN leaves his post and joins her.*]

I thought you was crazy about me. . . . That's what you said last winter! [*He takes her in his arms and they start dancing.*] What's the matter? . . . You get cold feet?

SECOND WORKMAN

You said it! Ran away!

FIFTH WOMAN

[*To remaining WORKMEN.*] You got a lotta sense! . . . Workin' when you get a chance to have a good time! . . .

FOURTH MAN

Yeah! Snap out of it, dopes!

[*WORKMEN hesitate, some desert, join THE MOB, dance, talk, curse, laugh. SEVENTH WORKMAN talks to BILL, looks over at HENDRICKS, nods to BILL, crosses to stand near HENDRICKS, and watches both TRACY and CARLSON. JIM goes to the FOURTH WORKMAN, tries to help him, but only gets in his way.*]

JIM

Tha's all right, Fred. . . . We'll get something.

. . .

BILL

[*To the remaining WORKMEN.*] Come on, ditch that stuff! We're through foolin'. Tomorrow The Old Man talks turkey. Tonight we raise hell!

[TRACY *starts to speak*. HENDRICKS *steps in front of him*.]

[*More* WORKMEN *join* THE MOB.]

FOURTH WORKMAN

[*To* JIM.] What's it all about? Ain't we been puttin' them out fast enough for the price cuts? Seems like we was!

JIM

I dunno. . . . Somethin's wrong. . . . Chees's, Fred, I'm goin' crazy!

THIRD MAN

[*In* THE MOB.] Too many cars, that's the trouble.

SEVENTH WORKMAN

[*To other* WORKMEN.] Like I told you! . . . Worked yourselves out of a job.

BILL

Yeah, nine months vacation——

CARLSON

That's enough, you goddam Red——

[CARLSON, *right hand in coat pocket, lunges at* BILL. BILL *tackles him, they fight*, HENDRICKS *and* SEVENTH WORKMAN *watching* TRACY. BILL *gets a half-Nelson on* CARLSON's *right arm and shoulder, bends* CARLSON's *head forward*.]

BILL

[*Yelling to SEVENTH WORKMAN.*] Get his gun, Steve. In his pocket.

SEVENTH WORKMAN

[*Taking gun from CARLSON's pocket, recognizing his face.*] Hello, Larsen, where's the moustache you had in Akron two years ago? [*Breaking out clip.*] Soft bullets of course! [*He restores clip and is about to pocket gun.*]

HENDRICKS

[*To SEVENTH WORKMAN.*] Let me have it, Steve. [*SEVENTH WORKMAN hands it over, reluctantly.* HENDRICKS *pockets gun, turns to TRACY.*] What's on your mind, Tracy?

TRACY

You'll never get out of here, Hendricks. We got the place covered.

HENDRICKS

That so? Want to bet on it?

BILL

[*To HENDRICKS, indicating TRACY.*] Is he a plant, too? [*Crosses to TRACY.*]

HENDRICKS

Sure. Stay away from him. . . . He's all right now.

BILL

[*To* TRACY.] So that's why you had to stop to telephone, you god-damned lying stool-pigeon.

TRACY

[*Evenly.*] I'll get you, Vance. . . . Plenty.

BILL

[*Belligerently.*] Why not right now?

TRACY

[*Indicating* THE MOB.] You're brave as hell, aren't you?

HENDRICKS

[*To* BILL and SEVENTH WORKMAN, *indicating* TRACY and CARLSON.] Let 'em alone. Just watch 'em. They'll be all right. [*To* THE MOB.] Nice boys, huh? This is a nice shop to work in!

FIFTH WORKMAN

I'm through! What the hell! [*He grins fiercely at* BILL, *teeth bared.*] I'm goin' to pull this job! Watch me! [*The* FIFTH WORKMAN *turns to all the other* WORKMEN, *visible and invisible, down the line, and raises his arm in that slow semaphore that has pulled millions of workers from their jobs. His shoulder is hunched, the arm starts up slowly until it is on a level with the shoulder and is then whipped over, forward and down with the snap of a good oarsman finishing a stroke.*] Come on!

[ALL OTHER WORKMEN follow, except FOURTH WORKMAN, who stays at his post, puttering around with the tipsy, tearful JIM. There is an interlude of revelry. Jazz, laughter, cursing, argument, dancing, frank kissing and love-making, loud talk, quarrels, slapped faces, more jazz, more laughter, rising in a fierce, nervous, desperate gaiety throughout. WORKMEN, WOMEN. come in from both sides, drift in and out.]

DANCERS

[In a fierce husky yet whimsical chorus, as they dance.]

We ain't gonna work no more.

We ain't gonna work no more!

But how in the hell

Can The Old Man tell

That we ain't gonna work no more?

[Laughter, applause, shouts. THE OLD MAN appears suddenly atop a half-finished car on The Belt. TRACY breaks away, crosses to HIM, touches cap, speaks warningly. THE OLD MAN shakes his head impatiently as the music breaks off, DANCERS stop, the talk falls and THE MOB falls back, quiet for the moment. The FOURTH WORKMAN and JIM go on puttering at the work. TRACY drifts over near CARLSON.]

THE OLD MAN

[*Speaking in amazement and impersonal horror after staring at the empty posts, THE MOB and the MUSICIANS.*] You crazy? [*A pause. A GIRL giggles. THE OLD MAN's attitude changes, stiffens into imperiousness like a father shooing bad children into the house.*] Get back to work! [*Pause. No one moves. His voice rises. TRACY speaks to CARLSON, who exits right; TRACY signals him when to stop and turns to watch THE OLD MAN and THE MOB.*] Get back, I say. Fred, George, Harry, Frank, Otto, Jack! For God's sake get back! You're holding up the whole Belt! What's struck you?

[*Unmoving silence.*]

SEVENTH WORKMAN

[*Stepping forward a pace with mock humility.*] Little old-fashioned dancing, sir, that's what America needs. [*Giggles and suppressed guffaws in THE MOB.*]

TRACY

[*To OLD MAN.*] Now?

[*THE OLD MAN shakes his head, resumes talk to the CROWD.*]

THE OLD MAN

[*Pointing finger at the SEVENTH WORKMAN and almost screaming.*] You're fired! [*To the others.*] Men, don't be fools! You've thrown our whole

month's schedule off' already. C'mon, we gotta catch up!

BILL

Why?

THE OLD MAN

[*Taken aback.*] How's that?

BILL

I said: Why do we have to catch up?

THE OLD MAN

Why? Why, because it's the schedule! We can't break that!

BILL

Why not?

THE OLD MAN

[*Looking closer.*] Where've I seen you before?

BILL

At Jim Thompson's last night. . . . You gave him a tin pin for keeping to your schedules for ten years. . . .

THIRD WOMAN

[*Screeching nervously.*] Yeah! A tin pin! I saw it! [*She laughs hysterically and rests her head and face on SECOND WORKMAN's shoulder.*] Oh, dearie, catch me as I fall!

[*General nervous laughter.*]

TRACY

[*To THE OLD MAN.*] Now?

THE OLD MAN

No. [*Laughter stops abruptly as THE OLD MAN raises his arm and points to BILL, as the leader.*] Come here! I'll tell you why. . . . [*BILL steps toward THE OLD MAN, as do HENDRICKS, NANCE and a few others.*] We gotta keep The Belt movin' because you people would starve without it! That's why, if you want to know. . . . [*He is surprised to find the same scornful silence over THE MOB, only the FOURTH WORKMAN and JIM looking at him with traces of respect and deference.*] What's made America prosperous? The Belt—Straight Line Production—High Wages, Efficiency, Speed, Low Production Cost, Low Prices, High Purchasing Power, More Efficiency, Cheaper Production, Shorter Hours, More Purchasing Power . . .

SIXTH WORKMAN

[*Interrupting with a loud insolent drawl.*] Why are you closing down Saturday?

[*Silence. THE OLD MAN is staggered by the question. He looks helplessly at TRACY, who is too taut to move. The CROWD breaks out in angry derisive murmurs.*]

SECOND WOMAN

So we're goina starve, are we!

SIXTH MAN

Yeah! Goddam you, what you gonna do about it?

CHORUS OF VOICES

Yeah, what about it?

THE OLD MAN

[After looking THE MOB over again and quickly gathering himself.] So! . . . Somebody squealed!

. . .

NANCE

[Stepping forward one pace.] Yes, I did! *[Her proud confession hits him hard again.]*

THE OLD MAN

[After a wretched pause.] —It's true!

[There is a wild burst of yells from the CROWD, going more mob-like by the second. It surges forward toward The Belt and THE OLD MAN. BILL raises his hand to hold them back. THE OLD MAN slowly and wearily raises his hand for silence. The cries die away gradually with:]

FIFTH WORKMAN

What you going to do about us?

THIRD MAN

Well, what you going to do about it?

FOURTH MAN

Where do we get off?

FIFTH WOMAN

I'm going to have a baby in two months. What about it? [*She leans forward, yells and points savagely.*] Look at him! He ain't going to starve to death hunting a job! Look at him! He's the devil! That's what he is!

[*Others silence her and lead her away, screaming.*]

TRACY

[*To THE OLD MAN.*] Now?

THE OLD MAN

[*Peevishly.*] No, hell no! [*In a tired voice to THE MOB.*] I can't help it. The country's crazy! They don't know what they want! . . . It's the bankers . . . they hold the money. . . . The old car ain't good enough. . . . Ain't fancy enough for the women! Gotta give 'em a new one that costs so much they can't pay for it. . . . Now the whole market's gone to smash. . . . Too many cars, that's what they say. . . . I dunno. . . . They didn't tell me about it in time. . . .

EIGHTH WORKMAN

Yeah, that's too goddam bad! But what about us?

SECOND WORKMAN

How about it, Rip Van Winkle? Wake up! [*Pause.*] Goddam it, wake up! What happens now?

THE OLD MAN

[*With a fictitious brightness.*] I dunno. . . . There's a chance. . . . Maybe we'll build planes. . . . [*He reels slightly.*] And then—I got an idea of goin' into farmin'—big—millions of acres—and lots of room for you all. . . . I dunno. . . . [*He catches himself and stiffens.*] But that ain't the idea! It's w r o n g for you to lie down on me like this! It's w r o n g !

BILL

You made a mistake on the market, didn't you?

THE OLD MAN

That's none of your business. That's my business. . . . I'm goin' to figure out somethin'. . . . Just give me time. . . . I'll figure out somethin'. . . . It's the banks . . . and the people. . . . They spend too much money. . . . I'll figure out something. . . .

SIXTH MAN

Yeah! You better run for President!

[*Harsh laughter.*]

THE OLD MAN

[*Pleading.*] C'mon, men! Let's start The Belt.
. . . We gotta make a good record to finish with.
. . . [*Brightening.*] Maybe there'll be a bonus.
. . . How about a bonus? . . .

SEVENTH WORKMAN

Sucker bait! Go to hell!

JIM

[*Eyes alight.*] That's a good idea—farming!
. . . I'm a good farmer! You can count on me!

FOURTH WORKMAN

Me, too! I gotta do somethin'! . . . Chees's!

FOURTH WOMAN

[*Shrilly, to THE OLD MAN.*] What about us
while you're figgerin'? How do we eat?

THE OLD MAN

Maybe you can get something else to do . . .
other jobs. . . .

BILL

[*In searing anger.*] You know that's bunk.
The whole country goes to hell when you quit.
That's why you're quittin'. Ain't that so?

THE OLD MAN

[*Flaring up.*] I ain't quittin'! D'you hear! My son may be scared . . . and the Board of Directors . . . and all the yellow sales agents. . . . But I ain't . . . d'you hear! [*Again, appealingly, to them all.*] C'mon, men! Let's get goin'! We're wastin' time! Start The Belt! [*He sways.*] God, I'm tired! Down here most every night. . . . Tryin' to figger out somethin'—— [*He beckons.*]

HENDRICKS

Give us half-pay!

THE MOB

Yeah, give us half-pay!

THE OLD MAN

[*After a short pause.*] No! I paid you good money. You should have saved it! . . . Come on, start The Belt!

[*No one moves.*]

FIFTH WORKMAN

[*Snarling.*] Look at him! . . . He's all in. . . . Let's go! Let's get him!

[*The Mob goes up to The Belt with a roar, checked by BILL and a woman's drawling voice.*]

SECOND WOMAN

What's the use! He's through . . . too old!
Look at him!

[They all stand, staring at him insolently.]

TRACY

[To THE OLD MAN.] How about it, Chief, now?

THE OLD MAN

[To TRACY, shaking his head distractedly.] No, not yet. *[To CROWD, wildly.]* Idiots! That's what you are! Idiots! You'd starve to death if it wasn't for me. . . . Get back to work! Get back to work, damn you! . . . *[Unmoving silence.]* What do you know about business, making cars, glass, iron, railroads, markets, credits, waterpower, fertilizers, running million-acre farms by machinery! . . . Come on, get to work! Don't act like a lot of fool Russians or savages! *[The same stubborn, moveless silence.]* God! . . . Are you Americans, or aren't you! Work, damn you, get to work! We gotta finish this job. You can't quit on me like this! *[Pointing imperiously.]* Get back here and start this Belt! D'you hear!

[They stand fast. He waits. Tableau.]

BILL

[To THE MOB.] Wait, men! *[All turn to BILL, who addresses THE OLD MAN.]* We'll start it!

[*BILL laughs wildly.*] We'll start it, all right!—just a minute!

[*BILL moves quickly, whispers to HENDRICKS, NANCE, OTHER WORKERS. They laugh, pass the word on to neighbors, slap each other on the back and shake in secret mirth.*]

THE OLD MAN

Hurry up, you! [*To BILL.*] Keep out of this, you damn bolshevik! I've got you spotted——

BILL

[*Gaily, over his shoulder.*] I'm helping you get The Belt started, don't you see? [*To the WORKMEN.*] All right, boys! [*They swarm over The Belt, take posts, some still toting sax or banjo or bottle, singing, winking, waving to the nervous, laughing WOMEN. The word is passed up and down the line. They wait for BILL's signal.*] Now! Let 'er go!

[*With roars, whoops, yells and banging, the WORKMEN unscrew, rip, tear, scratch, break and wreck the machines, taking them apart. The Belt starts to move backward!*]

TRACY

[*Bellowing to CARLSON up The Belt.*] All right, Carlson! Let 'em come! [*He beckons in command.*]

[THE OLD MAN *tries to stop the MEN. In the uproar and growing abandon he is thrust aside. He protects a machine with his bent body. He is again tossed aside. JIM and the FOURTH WORKMAN hover about him. Portly POLICE CAPTAIN enters, half-turns, signals to COPS to halt, turns, gun in hand, to TRACY.*]

TRACY

[*Pointing at BILL and MOB and yelling above the din.*] Get 'em out! Shoot that kid! He's the leader! Kill him!

[*ALL see COPS and freeze in half-completed movements.*]

CAPTAIN

[*Covering BILL with revolver and yelling to COPS off.*] Keep 'em covered. [*To THE MOB.*] Put up your hands! [*Several MEN and WOMEN raise their hands. SEVENTH WORKMAN, among others, does not. The CAPTAIN jumps to him, punches him in the stomach with his gun and steps back quickly, barking at SEVENTH WORKMAN.*] Stick 'em up!

SEVENTH WORKMAN

Go to hell!

[*HENDRICKS quickly and quietly moves to front of THE MOB.*]

BILL

[*Quietly, to SEVENTH WORKMAN.*] Put 'em up, Steve.

[*SEVENTH WORKMAN obeys BILL.*]

CAPTAIN

[*Whipping round to face BILL.*] You're under arrest.

BILL

Come and get me!

[*WORKMEN and others converge around BILL.*]

CAPTAIN

[*Starting for BILL and calling loudly to COPS.*] Ready. [*To BILL.*] You want buckshot and tear gas?

TRACY

[*Frantically, to CAPTAIN and COPS.*] Get 'em! Get 'em! Christ, they're crazy. Captain, you gotta get somebody! [*Pulling a gun from holster under his arm.*] By God, if you won't get him, I will! [*He levels gun.* SECOND WORKMAN *knocks it up, as it goes off.* NANCE *spins, clutches her shoulder, sways.* WOMEN *shriek and MOB closes in on TRACY, THE OLD MAN and the CAPTAIN.*]

BILL

[*Jumping to NANCE and tearing open the shoulder of her dress.*] Nance! Did he get you?—Let's see!—— [*Turning to TRACY.*] You dirty——

CAPTAIN

[*Following BILL with his gun. MOB looks fearfully at COPS off, backs away, then bunches and sways forward.*] You going to give up?

[*BILL kisses NANCE and pushes her back into the women of THE MOB who hold her. NANCE stares at him with set lips.*]

SECOND WOMAN

[*Shrieking at COPS and pointing at TRACY.*] Why don't you kill him, you murderers! Yah! Go ahead and shoot!

THE OLD MAN

[*Feebly, to CAPTAIN.*] Don't shoot. . . . I'm the Boss here, not Tracy.

CAPTAIN

Sorry, sir . . . too late. [*To BILL.*] Now are you coming quiet, kid, or do you want us to shoot up the whole crowd?

[*Pause. Tableau. CAPTAIN raises his gun as a signal. BILL steps out from the crowd.*]

THE OLD MAN

[*Weakly.*] What can you do for them?

BILL

[*Laughing.*] Nothing. Not a damn thing!
[THE OLD MAN *nods.*]

JIM

[*Shrilly.*] Now you've done it, damn you all to hell!

[FOURTH WORKMAN *cries quietly.*]

[JIM *shrieks at* BILL.] What do **we** get out of it? What do **you** get? What are **they** going to get out of it? Hey?

BILL

[*Laughing.*] Not a hell of a lot, maybe. Maybe we'll get a lot! Maybe we get ahead an inch, a foot, or a mile. You can't tell what's going to happen when hell breaks loose and men jump the fence. [*He laughs, raises his head and surveys* THE MOB.] But, what the hell! [*He points to* THE MOB *and goes on quietly.*] We're gettin' paid off right now! Twenty years from now every last damn one of them will be tellin' how they walked into The Old Man's Belt and took it apart! [*Turning to the* CROWD *that leans toward him in communion.*] See? Get me? Goddam it, we're standing up on our hind legs! [*He turns to* NANCE *and puts his arms around her.*] Huh?

[NANCE *throws her arms about his neck and kisses him passionately as the CROWD leans far forward and erect, exalted. BILL turns to the CAPTAIN, puts out his wrists and the handcuffs are put on. He smiles at the CAPTAIN and turns his head to the CROWD.*] I'll be back!

[*Both ways, it is a pledge. The curtains close.*]

THE END

